

Pianodao

The Way of Piano



My Practice Palette

Author of several great resources, Roberta Wolff here discusses the value of teaching students How to Practice, and introduces her latest publication "My Practice Palette"...

[Guest post by Roberta Wolff](#)

Question: "Why should my child learn the piano?"

Answer: "Because it will give them the opportunity to learn how to practice!"

What Our Students Learn

This is what students learn when we teach them How to Practise:

Practice is:

- Innovation
- Exploration
- Discovery
- Self-awareness
- Delayed Gratification
- Perseverance
- Resilience
- Patience
- Discipline
- Reflection
- Listening
- Mindset
- Metacognition.

Piano students learn how to:

- Fail and then go back with a new solution;
- Channel thoughts in a positive way;
- Have a healthy and positive internal dialogue, especially when things don't go to plan;
- Chip away steadily and cleverly every day to get to where they want to be;
- Consider things from different perspectives;
- Think outside the box;
- Accept where they are at and develop control over how to get where they want to go;
- Celebrate achievement;
- Deal with frustration...
- Be so fully absorbed in an activity they forget the humdrum of concerns and worries that is our human existence;
- Become briefly disentangled from the net of technology and its wildly distracting, and frequently pressuring messages...

... And I could go on, but you probably get the idea, through practice a young person can learn all the life skills required for a healthy, balanced outlook.

Practice and Life

Practice = micro the skills they will need for **Life = macro**.



Why then does the word “practice” so often induce negative connotations in student, parent and teacher?

I would like to share my work and some of what I have learnt and I invite you to share these ideas with your students and their families in the hopes that together we can repackaging practice:

FROM:

- *Lesson time = fun*
- *Practice time = occasionally boring and lonely and at times littered with frustrating attempts to recreate the work of the lesson to the teacher's specifications.*

TO:

- *Lesson time = questioning and discovering whilst brainstorming ideas with my teacher*
- *Practice time = questioning and discovering on my own terms (whilst engaging in and developing a most impressive array of life skills)*

My Practice Palette

“My Practice Palette” is a new resource designed to be an easy way to introduce changes in your students' practice.

- *My Practice Palette* works as a Practice Tutor, Log and Learning guide.
- It introduces students to the fundamentals of Practice (core practice techniques).
- It introduces students to the fundamentals of learning (metacognition and mindset).
- It supports teachers as they begin to embed these new skills during lesson time.
- It is non-prescriptive, supporting free choice, discipline and innovation.
- It does not require you to write Practice notes – it teaches methodology.
- Using colour, students get to craft a visual representation of their Practice process.
- Each palette consists of a framework which outlines core procedures in the learning process.
- It provides consistency which results in growing confidence, creativity and willingness to ask questions.
- It works equally well as a tool to aid lesson time or practice time, seamlessly linking the two by focusing on exploration and discovery.
- It provides an approach to learning where students can ask questions, trial ideas and make mistakes.

- It comes ready to use, including an introduction, which is written to help students (and parents) as they begin developing practice and learning skills.
- It is designed for students between approximately grades 1-5.
- The book will last at least a year.
- Like all good tutors your student will eventually no longer need it.
- *My Practice Palette* supports integrated learning. You will not need to find more time during lessons to use it, nor will you have to take time away from another skill. The time you invest in improving Practice will have a positive effect on **all** areas of learning.

As with any change, you may well meet some resistance, be prepared for some of these...

- What if my child just wants to learn for fun, this all sounds lofty and heavy and makes me think of homework? Surely this is only for those who wish to make a career of it.
- My child is doing well enough why should I upset the apple cart.
- My child wouldn't be up for this anyway; I couldn't get them to do it.
- There isn't enough time.
- Practice notes didn't work for me.
- Another book to buy!
- Ugh – Practice! Let's talk about something more interesting...

Looking at the bigger picture, there is nothing more interesting than empowering a young person. We don't know what challenges the next generation face, and certainly the future solutions they need to come up with will not be anything they can learn from us. What they **can** learn from us, as well as music, is all up there in the first paragraph.

To think about...

"Ideals are like stars. You will not succeed in touching them with your hands; but, like the seafaring man, you choose them as your guides and following them, you reach your destiny." – Anon.

There are many very persuasive reasons to teach Practice Skills and Metacognition as consciously and progressively as we teach technique, especially now.

When the topic of Practice struck a chord with me, I thought I had chosen a rather 'un-glossy' area of instrumental teaching to focus on. However, what I found is that by improving my students' practice, I improved my lessons, my teaching, and my students' practice.

It felt like I was reverse engineering this happy situation. After all, the changes were a ripple effect which ran from the outside in. That is, I changed what each student did at home and

this ran inwards producing all sorts of great outcomes for my studio.

I know now it was not reverse engineering. I had it all back to front – teaching Practice is at the core of what we do and as such it ought to be a primary concern. In teaching a student how to learn and Practice we arm them with amazing skills. These, together with the joy of making music, increase their steadfastness when the tsunami of our crazy world hits: social media, expectations, all round achievement, perfection, blurred lines of reality...

It is more than just practice notes; it is why we do what we do!

Concluding Reflections

I have enjoyed researching and creating *My Practice Palette* and introducing it to you here.

The process was much the same as that of piano practice:

Research – Learn or experience a concept – Use my experiences to create an idea, page or paragraph – Put it to the test and challenge it (less comfortable) – Refine it – Repeat.

I have done it because these are ideas worth sharing. This is the time to think big and redefine our ideas regarding what teaching practice and learning can offer the next generation.

I have also discovered things about myself, one being that I am not a great sales person, nor have I invested as much time developing these skills as I have others. I do believe *My Practice Palette* offers students a great opportunity to learn and develop, and buying it means you side step several years of work, but even if you don't, I hope this article resonates with you and you join me in this work.

We don't teach Practice to win competitions and increase the weight of expectation on our students' shoulders. We teach it to equip students for life.

I hope this has given you an opportunity to consider practice in a new light. I would love to hear your thoughts and experiences.

To find out more about my work please visit <http://www.musicmepiano.co.uk>

And look out for my next post '*Initiating Practice*' which will appear here on the Pianodao website in January!

Roberta Wolff

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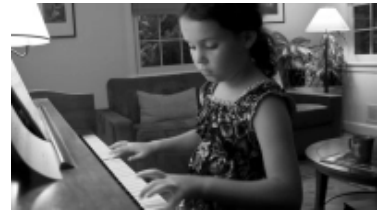
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