

August 29, 2014

Parents,

As a music teacher, there are several “hot points” that put people on edge as soon as you bring them up. Practicing is one of them. We all know that practice is necessary to improve but I think some are generously optimistic about how much their child is practicing. The Summer Practice Challenge very clearly illustrated this. As I look at the dots on my wall, I wonder if there are misunderstandings about what is expected and why regarding at home practice.

The numbers are hard. I have some students who took the challenge to heart, diligently putting up their 2 or 3 dots every week. Others have 4 dots—FOR THE ENTIRE SUMMER. That is four hours. If they counted just their lesson time that equals 4 dots. What that basically means is that they didn't have lessons over the summer. They practiced at my house.

Studio policy states that a student's at home practice should equal the length of his/her weekly lesson and that it should happen every day. At home practice should mirror what is happening at the weekly lesson and often we don't get to everything on his/her list, so of course daily practice should be the same length or longer. If it is not, the way we practice needs to be improved.

A core principle of the Suzuki Method is the Suzuki Triangle—where the parent, the student, and the teacher are each a corner of a triangle, connected by sides of equal length. Each person in the triangle plays an integral part in the education and success of the student. A parent's role is not simply that of chauffeur and financial backer. You are the at home teacher, the note-taker, the cheerleader, the cd player, and often, the bad guy who makes daily practice a priority and a non-negotiable. You have a hard job!

To help, starting this fall, I will have a parent chair ready and waiting for you so you can join our lessons. Come with a notebook and a pen, turn off your phone (unless you're recording) and participate so you can know what to listen for, where the tricky parts are, and how they are supposed to be practiced. If you hit a snag during the week, send me an email. If you have questions during the lesson, write them down and ask. If your student has questions, remind them and have them ask. Students will be asked to keep a record of not only if they practice every day, but also how long they practice. This will be recorded on a new chart on my wall. Some days, simply getting out your instrument or sitting down at the piano is all you can do. I recognize that. But it is better than letting practice slide.

Every person has different goals for enrolling their child in music lessons. We talked about some of those last fall when we had a discussion about the musical and non-musical benefits of taking lessons (which you can reference on the Studio Blog). Our list was long and we could make it longer still. As a new school year begins, I encourage each of you to mentally review the reasons you have for making music part of your child's life and then assess if you are seeing those results.

I love working with your children and I love teaching. The longer I use the Suzuki Method, the more respect I have for Dr. Suzuki and his genius. The longer I am a mom, the more I realize that Dr. Suzuki's philosophies are not about music, they are about parenting and providing an environment for our kids where they learn to excel and do hard things and to create something beautiful.

Sincerely,
Libby