



MUSIC IN PRACTICE

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Sue Hunt

Music isn't a Race

Learning an instrument is not a race. In music education, reaching higher playing standards is not about winning but about doing quality work. These strategies help me calm the competitive element in my music studio.

Parents and teachers who really understand, avoid asking questions comparing each other's children such as, "What book are you in?" or, "What music are you working on?" I am more interested in knowing what aspect of playing you are working on. This can mean posture, tone, shifting, et cetera. **No matter where our children are in the repertoire, we are always aiming to bring them to higher levels of performance, whatever music they might play.**

You can encourage this in your studio every time you put on a recital. Get each child to choose music at least half a book back from the one they are currently working on. Announce to the audience what specific playing technique the child has been working on. Ask children to focus on how beautifully they can play their music and not on level of difficulty of what music they are going to play. For instance, if a child has been working on a relaxed bow hold, I ask the audience to recognize and appreciate the **hard work and effort** this child has put into it. The music is the vehicle to demonstrate how well the child can perform this specific skill.

Choosing music from an earlier book allows us to play it more beautifully by adding more layers of skill, which we might not have been able to do when it was new.

On informal occasions, such as group music lessons where children have individual performance opportunities, I get them to play one of their earlier pieces. When the applause has died down, I encourage the other children to mention one good thing that they have noticed about the performance. They are getting really good at noticing improvements in posture and technique. It is lovely to see the performer stand slightly taller with each sincere compliment.

Sometimes, I get each parent at the group music lesson or concert to write down 3 good things that they noticed about each performer's playing. I then compile the comments into affirmation certificates for each child. We present these at private lessons with the words, **"You are such a hard worker!"** I'm always delighted by the child's extra efforts in the rest of the lesson.

----- *Sue Hunt* -----

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