

# Working with Students Who Can't, Won't, or Just Don't Practice (Enough)

Presented by Cathy Smetana

This title really does refer to three different types of students – and I've worked with all of them! ☺

## Can't

- Build up a base of knowledge in each class / lesson
- Provide paper keyboards
- Model how to practice without a keyboard/piano
- Choose appropriately-paced materials
- Improvisation projects
- Choose music that allows for different "levels" of acceptable completion
- Teach the concept, not (just) the repertoire

## Won't

- Were they ever interested? What changed? How can you get them back?
- Why are they in lessons? What are their musical goals?
- What are their parents' goals?
- Can you work with these goals?

## Just Don't

- (Almost) no guilt - just deal with the reality of the situation
- Don't assume you know why they aren't practicing. Ask. What are they resisting? What is intimidating?
- "I didn't have *any* time" is usually an excuse. We make time for what matters to us. Our job is to make music relevant to them – and be sure they know how to practice efficiently.
  - Make them do it in the lesson!
  - Marker game
  - "WHY can't I play this?!" There are limited answers – Reading? Theory? Technique? Fingering? Rhythm? Tempo? Focus? Once you know, you can fix it.
  - Practice smarter – intentionally direct the brain to think what it needs to think, the eyes to see what they need to see – notice, plan, and articulate the details; find the patterns.
  - "HIIT" – Focused, intense practice of a very small section – demand accuracy, demand musicality, and push the tempo
- Build up the toolbox. Students need to learn scales and chords, especially when they don't practice much! The more they know about how music is built, the easier it will be for them to learn music efficiently.
  - Landmark notes & interval recognition
  - Five finger patterns / scales / keys / I IV V
  - Chord songs / lead sheets
  - Improvisation / arranging / playing by ear or YouTube
- Find musically satisfying pieces that combine rote learning, pattern recognition, and reading
- Set long term goals that motivate / incentivize: make a recording, prepare a solo concert, write out a composition
- Motivate, inspire, equip, and empower!

## Cathy's Favorite (Piano) Resources:

- Index cards with the music alphabet, notes, rests written on them
  - Use a different color marker each time you write the alphabet to make it easy to sort during a group class; make enough cards so each student in class could have a full alphabet set
  - Use different colored cards for each type of note – write the note on the front and the rest on the back
- The Music Tree and related books (Side by Side, Students' Choice, and Supplementary Solos books)
- Etude I by Paul Sheftel
- A Splash of Color Book 1 by Dennis Alexander
- Picture This! Book 1 by Valerie Roth Roubos
- Les Petites Images and Les Petites Impressions by Jennifer Linn
- Preludes, Book 1 by Robert Vandall
- Lyric Preludes in Romantic Style by William Gillock
- Keyboard Jewels Book 1 by Randall Hartsell
- Pattern Play & Chord Play books by Forrest Kinney
- Beatles, Adele, and Coldplay songs
- The Easy Fake Book series
- Essential Keyboard Repertoire Volume 1, edited by Lynn Freeman Olson
- A very partial list of patterned Classical pieces:
  - Almost anything by Kabalevsky
  - Solfeggieto by C P E Bach
  - Spinning Song by Elmenreich
  - Prelude in C Major, Little Prelude in C Minor by Bach
  - Ballade, Arabesque, L'Orage by Burgmuller
  - Prelude by Gliere
  - Puck, Notturmo by Grieg