

# The Power of Positive Pedagogy

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Positive Pedagogy revolves around the way we begin music study and the ways we fulfill the potential of each student in their study of music.

➤ **Give your students the tools for genuine, long-range success.**

Success is the greatest motivation. (Please read that statement several times!)

The intrinsic rewards of music study are the most important, long-range benefits. They include the following:

- Awakening students to the power of their own minds.
- Involving them in the exciting syntax of the musical language to help them express what they are feeling.
- Helping them develop powers of focus and attention to detail.

**REWARDS: Your students become increasingly self-motivated, involved, and successful.**

➤ **Start with RHYTHM!**

Then do everything that follows in a definite rhythm. Because rhythm activates our centers for attention and involvement in addition to being a primary shaping force of music, this living pulse—the very heart-beat of music—enlivens everything we do in learning and making music.

**REWARDS: Your students will learn faster, be able to integrate the essential elements of musical expression *from the beginning*, and will surprise even themselves with their vital performances and compositions!**

➤ **Lavish time on new issues.**

You save time by spending time at the right time!

The right time is whenever you start anything new, whether it is a new piece or a new concept. You want your students to bring it back alive, without any errors or omissions to remedy. To accomplish this you must take the time to prepare them so wonderfully that they cannot wait to get home and work on it successfully.

**REWARDS: Your students come to their lessons ready for the next big steps you can show them. Because you lose no lesson time correcting mistakes or coaching omissions, you will have more time to spend on new issues. This creates an ever-larger and more fulfilling cycle of accomplishment and involvement.**

➤ **Start with the BIG PICTURE.**

Without the big picture, the steps in the learning process can seem endless and unrelated. Starting with the big picture makes accomplishing each step as satisfying as fitting together the pieces of a puzzle. Furthermore, students recognize their growth because they see where they are in the learning process—an encouraging revelation.

**REWARDS: Your students can make even more sense of their assignments. Music soon becomes a second language to them.**

➤ **Develop each student's inner hearing.**

Being able to hear what we see on the page assures personal involvement. This inner hearing is the basis of the mental matrix from which we create what we want to play and what we want to express in our performance. Inner hearing is one of the essential elements of musicianship. Without this skill, students use the piano like a dictionary to “translate” what they see on the page into sound. This mechanical reading accounts for the wooden performances that are all too typical of elementary students.

**REWARDS: Your students will perform with genuine musicality and invention rather than “typing” on the piano keyboard.**

➤ **Cultivate each student's imagination and problem-solving skills.**

This makes their daily practice an adventure in self-discovery. Awaken your students' inventive powers at lessons and classes by asking questions that lead them to discovering mistakes and solving problems. These important skills will serve them throughout life and all its adventures.

**REWARDS: Your students become more deeply involved in their practicing. They come to lessons confident and prepared. They can then fulfill the positive expectations you have for each student.**

➤ **Teaching students how to practice is a splendid gift.**

Few young people know how to work effectively and with imagination. Gaining this skill can transform their lives. Effective practicing requires commitment, patience, insight, flexibility, keen listening, and sometimes courage as well as other skills and states of mind. Be sure that students' parents are aligned with your objectives. Asking students to play something X number of times *without a specific goal accomplished each time* is a prescription for boredom. The point is to accomplish something worthwhile each day, and to have the assignment prepared for the next lesson.

**REWARDS: Your students come to see each assignment as an adventure in discovery and learning. Their practice skills grow and develop, helping them with their schoolwork as well.**

➤ **Never settle for getting something RIGHT!**

Getting it right is a given. It must also be *musical and interesting*—so start that way. There is nothing worse than a “correct” performance. It lacks vitality, imagination, personality, and risk taking. (Menachem Pressler once said that a performance succeeds only when we go to the brink of losing control, but don’t)

**REWARDS:** Your students become deeply involved in every note they play, and they succeed in communicating this conviction to their audience.

➤ **Encourage your students to be active learners, not receivers of doses of information.**

Ask students questions.

Involve them in making decisions.

Have them show you how to do something.

Help them to become “participating students” by *not* doing their thinking for them.

**REWARDS:** Your students recognize and celebrate their accomplishment autonomously. The “ball of learning” is squarely in the student’s court!

➤ **Learn to use mistakes as tools.**

At lessons, find the root cause of the error and deal with that; otherwise you will be correcting the same type of mistakes week after week. Help students learn to recognize a mistake rather than pointing it out to them. Encourage students to think of mistakes as a gift, for errors show us something we either overlooked or have not completely absorbed. Celebrate these discoveries with your students.

**REWARDS:** Your students will see the wisdom of our “Look before you Leap” motto. They will also make constructive use of errors rather than worrying about making mistakes.

➤ **Don’t boil things down.**

Instead, make everything come into full bloom for your students. We must recognize that the 30-minute lesson continues to impede everyone in teaching and learning music. Much pedagogy is designed to fit the limits of short lessons. This can result in shrink-wrapping a vast and inspiring subject into small, less-than-challenging doses.

**REWARDS:** Your students will blossom into motivated and interested young musicians. It is also quite likely that your hair will turn grey at a much later date.

➤ **We want to make sure our students love to learn.**

So we must do something at every lesson that makes them feel empowered!

*It is our responsibility to develop the following concrete aspects of fluid intelligence in our students:*

- Their ability to focus.
- Their interest in connecting ideas.
- Their enthusiasm to do this long enough to create new ideas and personal expression..
- Their confidence to be able to do this in performance, and by memory.

**REWARDS:** Your students will respond to your encouragements to discover. They will experience renewed initiative. They will grow into making use of constructive appraisal. They may also become your friends for life. Remember that what we expect of and assign to our students is the most meaningful demonstration of our admiration and respect for them.

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