

2.5 Giving them ownership over the instructions

One of the easiest ways to convince someone else to adopt an idea *you've* had, is to help them feel that it was *their* idea. People don't need to be persuaded about a plan that they believe was theirs to begin with...in fact, they

are likely to be champions for it, particularly if it looks like they might be also getting some of the credit. Presto—you have an instant ally, without even needing to mount an argument.

It's a tactic that is used by shrewd power brokers in committees all around the world. (In fact, if you have ever been on a committee, unless you are the one occasionally doing it, it's probably been done to you.)

A substantial part of getting students to do the practice you need them to is convincing them that the tasks to be practiced are good ideas. In other words, to convince them that the vision for the week ahead is worth pursuing. You can either expend some serious energy with a PR campaign for *your* idea, telling them what a fabulous difference your instructions will make to their piece this week...

...or you can make the whole thing *their* idea. It's not as Machiavellian as it sounds—in fact, it's a great way to promote harmony as well as boost motivation.

Instead of simply telling them what they need to work on, make a list—with the student—of the various problems that need to be solved in their pieces at the moment. Perhaps the dynamics are directionless in this one. Or the tempo is only half what it should be in that one.

Then, armed with that list, ask them to tell you what they will be practicing this week. Have them detail exactly what they are hoping to achieve. They have free choice as to what this is, but the recent discussion you had about problems in their pieces will have put those issues at the front of their minds. Whatever their practice intentions for the week, they are highly likely to include a reshaping of dynamics for the first piece, and a speeding up the second piece.

Of course, these issues were really *your* issues. It's a variation on the Henry Ford principal of “You can have whatever color you like as long as its black”—your student is highly likely to be “choosing” from within the framework of the limited agenda you set for them. If you listed for them “bad fingering” as an issue of concern, you can bet it will come up in their practice intentions somewhere.

And if it doesn't, you can always steer it:

“Sally, this plan looks like a good one—but didn't I hear you saying earlier today that you wanted to improve your fingering in the minuet? I thought that was a great idea at the time...did you also want to include that in your practice plan too?”

Oh yes. How did I overlook that. Silly me, you're right, it was a good idea I had. Add it, make it so.

It's as though you have given them a steering wheel...but then ensured that they are driving a train. They'll be busy turning the wheel and "steering" the train, but you will have laid out the tracks for them in advance.

Everyone's happy—they have a feeling of ownership over what has to be done this week. You have been able to set the agenda to reflect what needs to be done.

2.6 Involve parents in the process

There is an entire chapter later in this book devoted to the role of parents, but at the very least, they need to be well informed each week as to what the tasks for the week are. The heart of the Practice Revolution is a shift away from practicing based on time, towards practicing to get particular jobs done—as the principal supporters of the student, parents absolutely need to know what these jobs *are*.

There are a number of ways you can do this. You can create a special section in the notebook that the parent needs to read and sign each week—candid notes about the task ahead, together with details of the practice techniques that the child should be using to complete the task. If you have your own studio web site (see chapter 14 for details on how to do this), parents can pop into their child's web page at any time in the week, and see the practice instructions for themselves. They can also send you messages with any problems or breakthroughs they may have observed, ensuring that you can hit the ground running next lesson.

Another technique is to have a debriefing at the end of every lesson, in which you go through—with the parent—exactly what is required of the week that's coming up. Encourage the parents to follow up on this by talking to their child about it in the car on the way home. A well-planned practice week with a clear understanding of the task at hand is half the battle won before the first note is even played.

And the other half of the battle? Most of the rest of the book is dedicated to winning that, but before we go any further, we need to spend some time looking at why these battles are so often *lost*.