

TEACHING NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS TO FISH

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WHAT DOES A NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT LOOK LIKE?

- Video game lover
- Hates classical music
- Prefers Composing
- Sings more than plays
- Makes “beats” in Logic Pro
- Has a learning disorder
- Plays in a band
- Another piano teacher
- Shy adults
- Broken home
- Low-income family
- Behavior issues
- Learned “Fur Elise” on YouTube
- And more...

HOW CAN YOU HELP THEM BECOME INDEPENDENT?

- Focus on interest
- Give resources, not answers
- Question everything
- Teach process, not product
- Lead by example
- Collaborate, not control
- Instill values first, music second
 - (persistence, consistency, curiosity, self-discipline, patience, thoughtfulness, passion, and creativity, etc.)

CASE STUDY

- Jane is a classically trained pianist, running a multi-teacher studio.
 - Interest: Audio production and composing for young students
 - Resources: [The Study of Orchestration](#), by Samuel Adler
 - Questions: Why use Alberti bass, and not repeated chords?
 - Process: Analyzed students' music, to see what's "possible"
 - Example: Joined my email list for free pieces (subscribed at [OillPianoUniverse.com](#))
 - Collaborate: Led to a very original "EDM" style
 - Values: Confidence, persistence, patience.
 - Always waited for me, to "It's a lot of work!," to amazing surprise compositions.

THANK YOU!

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FOCUS ON INTEREST

- Make the thing they love the heart of their lesson, and all else supplemental.
- Ex. Jasmine loves Animé music. We:
 - Don't do much classical music festivals/exams,
 - Arrange music and notate it with Musescore,
 - Compose music that could be used in Anime films
 - Sample read scores to get ideas for “riffs.”
 - Prepare to play songs “on request”
 - Analyze audio recordings of Animé music for aural skills and theory development

GIVE RESOURCES, NOT ANSWERS

- When your students ask a question, point to a resource that has the answer and more.
- Ex. Jeremy loves classical music but doesn't like exams and workbooks.
 - He uses pianopedia.com to find new pieces, The Pianist's Guide to Standard Teaching and Performance Literature to confirm it will be a comfortable level, and YouTube to confirm whether he likes the piece before trying it.
 - He uses music theory apps and websites like Musictheory.net and Teoria.com to brush up on theory and aural skills.
 - He picks up technique tips from Instagram pages like @piano_tips_opu and @Entrada_Piano

QUESTION EVERYTHING

- Questions lead to growth. They are the second step of the scientific method.
- Ex. Jerome is a traditional student.
 - To make his interpretations more unique, I treat him like a non-traditional student, asking questions like:
 - Why does this composer go from a I to a V chord?
 - What would you change about this score that Beethoven wrote?
 - How many ways can you play this same passage?
 - How does the emotions you feel affect your technique?

TEACH PROCESS, NOT PRODUCT

- Understanding how is better than knowing what. (This is Middle C, because...)
- Ex. Jared has ADD and autism, and he makes MIDI recordings on Logic Pro with me.
 - Instead of saying “put this note here, and this one here,” I say “how can you figure out where to place the next note?”
 - Instead of saying “set the tempo to 120,” I say “match the speed of the recording”
 - Instead of saying “add 3 instruments: guitar, bass, and drums,” I say “what instruments would sound good together, and why?”
 - When he gets off topic because of his ADD and autism, I say “I absolutely want to hear about _____, but first let’s do _____, because _____. I promise I will give you a few minutes afterwards to talk about it.”

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

- If you are learning, practicing, creating, exploring, etc., then your students might, too.
- Ex. Joe has a broken home, loves improvising in a romantic era style, and struggles with reading.
 - I don't hide many details of my life, and I share, if it's relevant to a lesson. I even wrote a blog post sharing the struggles I overcame to get to where I am.
 - I'm planning to improvise on a recital in August. It's the first time I ever have done so, formally.
 - I opened up about my own reading struggles, and showed him my sight-reading blog post, which discussed how I'm still overcoming that issue.
 - When picking new repertoire, he likes to hear the pieces first. Instead of playing recordings, I push myself to sight-read in front of him.

SHARE THE WHEEL

- Let your student lead the way sometimes. It may hurt for the short term, but it helps a lot for the long-term. You'll see independent learning in action and be able to work on it.
- Ex. Jimmy has perfect pitch and high-functioning autism, and he loves making video game arrangements and improvising in a similar style.
 - He makes 90% of his arrangements, the 10% I contribute brings his arrangements to a higher standard.
 - We'll often have "jam" sessions, where we take turns playing, stealing ideas from each other.
 - Because of the perfect pitch, I let him do most of the "by ear" work by himself.
 - I find that I *have to* let him take the lead sometimes, or else he becomes unfocused and less interested, likely because of his autism.

INSTILL VALUES FIRST, MUSIC SECOND

- If they master all the values on the third slide, they might not even need a teacher.
- Ex. Jordan, a six-year-old, learned Für Elise on YouTube before starting lessons.
 - He forgot how hard he worked on it. I always remind him of patience and persistence.
 - His practice wasn't diverse, it only consisted of YouTube. I gave him many different activities, like composing and listening to do at home, to build on his creativity and curiosity.
 - I build confidence and self-discipline by putting a piece of sheet music in front of him, knowing his reading skills are far behind his playing skills, and sitting quietly while he figures it out, only stepping in when he is totally lost.