

What Works for Students

By Diane Trautman

With backgrounds in the arts, my husband and I decided years ago that we would invest in weekly music lessons if our sons expressed such an interest. More than a decade later, we feel that regular music lessons have been among the best of our investments.

Before we committed to weekly lessons, I called several piano teachers. Each had a significant history with the instrument and each was thorough in explaining her approach to teaching. When I asked the instructor I finally selected what method she used to teach piano, she said “I work with the student to find the method that works best for him or her.” Bingo! She not only had the expertise, she also said the magic words.

The ability and willingness to adjust one’s approach to suit the student’s needs is an important quality in a teacher or a tutor. There are many teachers who wish they had more hours with their students so they could modify their instruction individually. Unfortunately, such highly personalized service is not available, even in the best public or private schools. Students who cannot adapt to traditional teaching styles and the pace of the lessons stumble and fall behind.

The learning process can and should be enjoyable, but it isn’t always so. Expanding one’s physical skills, and one’s ability to think deeply about a subject, to absorb and apply information and to produce a new idea can be demanding and tiring. It presents even greater challenges for the student who has no sense of his or her learning style, only a brief history of achievement, and little or no faith in her ability. Adults can more readily adjust to failures as a part of learning, but children, with their limited experience, tend to view the situation as hopeless because they can’t see the options.

An experienced and caring tutor can teach a willing student how to use their strengths and compensate for their weaknesses and otherwise provide the student with a positive image of themselves that can guide them throughout the education process.

So, is my older son, with ten years of piano under his belt, a virtuoso? No. But he’s a well-rounded student who has discovered music as a means of expressing himself in the world and may well pursue music education as he heads off to college. We made an investment and so did his teacher. Thank you Rosy!