



Trackable Teaching Moments (TTMs) : Summary of our 5 week parent observation training project.

For five weeks, we have focussed on the moments when students receive feedback from their teachers (and parents, during home practice). For the purposes of our project, we have called these moments "Trackable Teaching Moments" or TTMs for short. We have practiced recognizing TTMs and the many forms they can take, seeing when they are most frequent, assessing whether they are successful or not, and most importantly, recognizing that the most important feedback for students is comparing their efforts to their memory of the desired result that they have formed through listening to the reference recording.

Here is a one page summary of the weekly observation projects for easy reference.

1 - Notice them

What is a "trackable teaching moment (TTM)"? It is any interaction between the teacher and the student that is intended to provide feedback on student efforts. Keeping track of these moments and what occurs during them is important to understanding what and how to practice at home between lessons. We could just call them "teaching moments (TMs)" but it is important that the teacher makes them obvious enough to be noticed by the parent and the student. If you can't keep track of them, you can't take them home with you. Therefore, "trackable teaching moments", or TTMs for short.

Parents need to understand what an effective TTM is so they can offer them during home practice. They learn this through careful observation of the teacher during lessons. If you don't notice these moments, ask the teacher to make them more obvious! Teachers become more effective if they get feedback from the parents - the TTM works in both directions!

2 - Notice when they happen

Lessons usually consist of many short activities that focus on different aspects of playing the instrument. TTMs may occur more or less frequently depending on the particular activity and the needs of the student. The more TTMs, the more help a student requires to be successful. The fewer TTMs, the more the student is able to work independently. If the teacher is not intervening, it doesn't mean that the student is doing everything correctly. It may indicate that the teacher sees that the student is self-correcting and improving on his/own without assistance. This is an important goal for developing the ability to practice independently.

Parents need to know when to offer a TTM. If your child is having difficulty, they may not need one from you right away. Trial and error is an important part of learning, and to quote Dr. David Gerry, "Don't cripple your child with the expectation that they will always be told what comes next." Parent need to be sensitive to their child's learning style and frustration level before offering feedback. Sometimes the simplest thing is to ask the student, "Do you want me to help you with this, or do you want to work it out for yourself first?"

3 - Notice how many different forms they can take

A TTM does not necessarily have to be a verbal observation, correction, suggestion, or question. It can also be non-verbal: a light touch, a smile, a gesture can also provide important feedback to a student. Demonstrations, either live or by listening to a recording, are also teaching moments. So is creating a game to help a student self-assess their own work, or using a toy to feel or visualize an effect.

Observe how many different TTMs are employed by your teacher. Parents, with their deeper understanding of their children, are often quicker at assessing the effectiveness of different kinds of TTMs with their child. This will change as the student gains maturity and experience. What is appropriate for a 5yr old beginner will not always work best for a teenager. Even if one style of TTM seems to work best, try to always offer a variety, to develop student flexibility and engage different thought processes as they mature.

4 - Notice if they work

The most important part of a TTM is: does it draw the students attention to a possible change that will make a noticeable difference? Successful TTMs create a noticeable difference in the students' playing. Unsuccessful TTMs may demand more than the student is capable of, and need to be broken down into smaller steps, or they may be demanding the creation of a difference that is too fine for the students' ability to notice. If there is a large discrepancy between the total number of TTMs and the number that make a noticeable difference, some refinement of the teaching process is required.

Parents can play an important role in lessons by letting the teacher know if they hear a difference after a TTM. After all, if you are not certain of the difference it makes, you will not be able let your child know when his/her efforts are successful. Some differences are obvious, some are subtle, and some might not make a big difference now but will create good habits that will make a big difference later. Make sure you know what the goal is, and how to make the difference noticeable to your child so he/she understands when they have been successful. Eventually your child will notice the differences before you have a chance to offer feedback. You can encourage the development of self-assessment by framing feedback as specific questions: "When you did _____ did you hear a difference in the _____?"

5 - Notice how listening affects the need for them

The most important part of a TTM is noticing the difference that it makes in the student's playing. If students have a very clear aural model of what they are trying to achieve, they will be engaging in a constant stream of internal TTMs as they compare similarities and differences between their own playing and the reference recording. This internal feedback loop is necessary to help students learn to practice independently.

The first place you will notice this is when a student is learning notes and rhythms to a new piece. This is the moment when the parent can let the child work it out on his/her own. Just play the recording a lot and leave the room when its time for the students to figure out some of the new piece. Noticing whether the next note is the same, higher, or lower, and understanding how to reproduce that on the instrument, is one of the first skills to develop and one that the student can enjoy using to work independently and confidently. If you do not listen to the reference recording, this skill will not develop.

Refinement of expression requires a higher level of skill, and this is where the parent can be most helpful in noticing differences and supporting the TTMs that effect change in the students playing. As students become more skilled, they will also be able to internalize these aspects of playing from the recording as well. In this way the parent's assistance in practice will gradually become less over the years, until the last thing you relinquish is playing the reference recording (which you can plan to do until your child is 30.)