



From the Playroom

JANUARY 2014 • A PUBLICATION OF CHILDREN'S INSTITUTE INC.
A NOT-FOR-PROFIT AGENCY • COPYRIGHT ©2014

Practice is defined as “doing something repeatedly in order to acquire a skill or proficiency.”

I grew up in an era when pianos were frequently found in homes. My mother, a first grade teacher, taught at a time when it was common for all first grade teachers to play the piano. And yes, I too, took piano lessons. Roberta Thompson was my teacher and every Tuesday afternoon I would be dropped off for my lesson.

I was required to practice every week. I don't remember for how long or how often, I just remember having to practice. By the time I reached junior high (now known as middle school), enough was enough! My mother gave up on nagging as I gave up on practicing. However, by the time I was in high school, I wanted to take lessons again! We found a new teacher who lived in a lovely apartment and had a beautiful grand piano. We compromised on what I had to learn – Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, a Clementi Sonata, and, last but not least, a Burt Bacharach piece! Three pieces – each very different – one recital.

Today, I can sit at the out-of-tune piano in my home and play each of the three – not very well, mind you – but more than four decades later, I can muddle my way through them and feel a sense of accomplishment. How is that possible, you ask? Practice, practice, practice. The hours of practice led to motor memory, auditory memory, and visual memory.

So how do we become better as Child Associates? We practice. We get feedback. We practice again and again and again. We stretch ourselves and incorporate general statements, words, and feelings. Primary Project is more than tracking what a child does; it is absorbing, reflecting, and incorporating all you have observed and heard. Just as I had a piano teacher who gave me feedback, Child Associates have supervisors that observe, listen, guide, model, and support them. It has been suggested that it requires at least ten

“For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.”

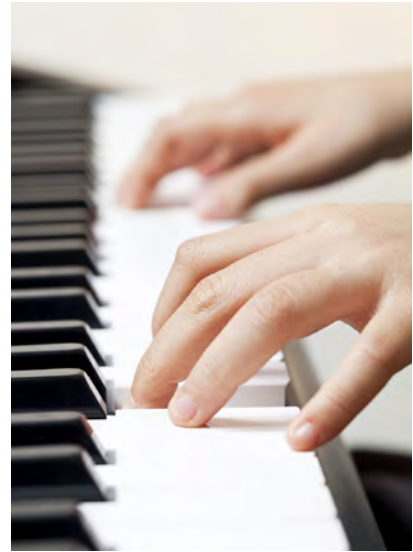
*–Aristotle,
The Nicomachean Ethics*

years and/or 10,000 hours of intentional practice to become an expert performer in any given domain. That's equal to practicing more than 416 days, for 24 hours a day! But don't panic! None of us are turning into international stars, but it is a reminder that learning new skills so they become incorporated into our daily encounters doesn't happen after participating in a two-day training.

Likewise, how do we become better as supervisors? We do it over and over and over again. We get feedback from folks. We take notes and identify what we do well and in what areas we still need to grow. We review the notes before the next session and we start again. We, too, note that we will and do get better.

So, practice, practice, practice – both now and throughout the year. Review, reflect, and renew!

*–Deborah Johnson, Ed.D.
Director of National Services, Children's Institute*



Practice does not make perfect

As we have come to know, “practice does not make perfect.” With time, practice allows us the opportunity to learn and grow from what has worked well, and what has not worked so well. With so much emphasis on rigor within education, as a Child Associate, I have learned through my “practice” that I must balance being an intent listener, effective communicator, and flexible scheduler.

“That which we persist in doing becomes easier, not that the task itself has become easier, but that our ability to perform it has improved.

–Ralph Waldo Emerson

Primary Project is not limited to the students we serve; it builds upon relationships within the school and community. While we work to provide high-quality social and emotional interventions to students, simultaneously, we are working to understand teachers' concerns about pull-out time from the classroom and the importance of academic performance, and having conversations with parents around their child's social emotional health. Creating, growing, and maintaining relationships are the heart of Primary Project, and the benefits of intentionally investing in these relationships becomes evident in the overall acceptance and success of the program.

Training does not prepare you for each situation that you may encounter, but it does build a foundation and point of reference. Through practice, you develop what works

best for you and your school's culture, while maintaining the integrity of the program. By participating in decision making teams, collaborative relationships with families, faculty, service providers, and administration are formed.

As Child Associates, we are to be intent listeners, effective communicators, and flexible schedulers. Our role goes much deeper than what can be visibly seen. The more we practice, the more likely it is our professional practices will change, which is necessary for the success of Primary Project and the impact of that one-on-one relationship in the life of a child.

*–Jennifer Reynolds, Child Associate
Charlotte Sidway Elementary, Grand Island, NY*

Practice makes progress

With one year under my belt as a Primary Project Child Associate, I kicked off this school year with great anticipation. It felt wonderful to have a firm foundation in place with the playroom equipped, the staff informed, and basic procedures established. While our first year was marked by getting acquainted with the blueprint of Primary Project, this year ushered in the opportunity for growth beyond initial training.

Revisiting the materials I received during training was essential in strengthening my grasp of the child-led play intervention at the start of the year. After learning the basics, ongoing supervision created the space for me to build skills and gather new resources for my toolkit. During supervision, I reflect on my own experience in the playroom while learning from the perspective and example of my supervisor. Likewise, her recommendations of articles and books, such as Virginia Axline's *Play Therapy*, serve as a window into the playrooms of other professionals. Hearing and reading these real examples of child-led play in progress informs my interactions with the children.

Some of the best teachers of child-led play are the children themselves! Remembering to stay present with them and allow them to direct the process never fails. It is often by their promptings that my ideas are challenged and my skills are honed. The children remind me that practice does not "make perfect" but it does make progress!

*–Stephanie Villafuerte, Child Associate
Manhattan Charter School*

*"The way anything is developed
is through practice practice
practice practice practice
practice practice practice
practice and more practice."*

–Joyce Meyer

Bringing the Lessons Home

Building a solid base for developing children's skills

As a parent, have you ever wondered, "Why does my child play with or repeat the same things over and over again?" To adults, this repetitious play seems dull or uninteresting, but this is how young children practice skills and achieve mastery. For example, children may spend what seems like hours trying to build a tall structure with blocks; however, it keeps falling down! Eventually, they learn that their tower needs a solid foundation to support the height and weight of their creation. Once they have practiced and mastered the task of creating a solid base, the possibilities are endless and their skills continue to develop.

As children grow and develop, they are continually building on what they have learned and adding and learning new skills along the way. Not only are they learning new skills, but they are learning what it takes to persevere and that success often follows failure! Parents can help support their children by giving them lots of opportunities to practice and master skills, to make mistakes, and then to try again! When you are there as a parent, you can encourage them along the way so that they keep trying. Respond with interest and excitement when kids show off a new skill, and acknowledge their effort, no matter how big or small. As new challenges present themselves, children will approach them confidently knowing that they have been successful in other areas.

*—Lynn Smith, LMSW
Social Worker, Children's Institute*

Please feel free to copy this page and share it with Primary Project parents.



Trayendo las Lecciones al Hogar

Creación de una base sólida para desarrollar las destrezas de los niños

Como padre, alguna vez se ha preguntado, “¿Por qué mi niño juega con o repite las mismas cosas una y otra vez?” Para los adultos, este juego repetitivo parece aburrido o poco interesante, pero así es como los niños pequeños practican las destrezas y logran dominarlas. Por ejemplo, los niños pueden pasar lo que parece ser horas tratando de construir una estructura alta con bloques; sin embargo, la misma sigue cayendo! Eventualmente, ellos aprenden que la torre necesita una base sólida para sostener la altura y el peso de su creación. Una vez que han practicado y dominado la tarea de crear una base sólida, las posibilidades son ilimitadas y sus destrezas siguen desarrollándose.

A medida que los niños crecen y se desarrollan, ellos continuamente edifican sobre lo que han aprendido y añaden y aprenden nuevas destrezas. No solamente están aprendiendo nuevas destrezas, sino que están aprendiendo lo que se requiere para perseverar y que el éxito usualmente sigue al fracaso! Los padres pueden ayudar a apoyar a sus niños dándoles muchas oportunidades para practicar y dominar las destrezas, cometer errores y luego tratar de nuevo! Cuando usted está ahí como padre, usted puede animarles durante el recorrido de modo que ellos sigan tratando. Responda con interés y entusiasmo cuando los niños presumen una nueva destreza, y reconozca su esfuerzo, sin importar si es grande o pequeño. Cuando nuevos retos se presenten, los niños se enfrentarán a los mismos confiadamente sabiendo que han logrado éxito en otras áreas.

—Lynn Smith, LMSW
Trabajadora Social, Children’s Institute

Siéntase en libertad de copiar esta página y compartirla con los padres del Primary Project.



**Congratulations to
Pearl Harbor Kai Elementary School
in Honolulu, Hawaii
for receiving Primary Project
National Certification**

children's
institute



**STRENGTHENING SOCIAL AND
EMOTIONAL HEALTH**

274 N. Goodman Street, Suite D103
Rochester, New York 14607
(585) 295-1000 (phone)
(585) 295-1090 (fax)
(877) 888-7647 (toll free)

www.childrensinstitute.net

Children's Institute is affiliated with the University of Rochester