



## **Episode 53: Addressing Frustration in Practice through Neuroscience with Kimberley Wong**

Welcome to Episode 53 – I want to start off today and thank everyone who has been reaching out and letting me know that have been enjoying the latest episodes of the podcast and sharing them with families they work or putting the ideas into practice with their children . . . I can't tell you how motivating is. This podcast is labor of love and your feedback means so much!

You can always reach out through my Instagram @SuzukiTriangle or Timetopracticepodcast(all one word)at gmail.com. If this episode resonates with you, I'd be honored to have you share it with a friend, colleague, or with the families in your program or studio.

Today we're speaking with Kimberley Wong a Suzuki violin teacher in South London, who discusses the importance of understanding neuroscience and child psychology in music education. This was such an interesting conversation about how the brain looks to protect us from frustration, how that can show up in the home practice relationship, and what we can do to help.

Enjoy!

Christine Goodner:

Welcome everyone. Today I'm excited to be talking to Kimberley Wong and Kimberly came on the podcast in episode two. So if you have not heard that episode yet and you enjoyed this one, then definitely go back and listen for more ideas. And we talked a lot about Kimberly's own practice journey and other ideas that we won't cover in today's session, but definitely go back and check that out. And Kimberly, I'm hoping for those who have not heard you yet or who haven't met you yet, you could share a little bit about who you are and what you do related to music.

Kimberley Wong:

Absolutely. Thanks so much for inviting me back, Christine. It's really amazing to hear all of the amazing things everybody's saying on your podcast, and it's amazing how everyone links everything kind of

together. We're all coming from the same point of view with very different ideas on how to put them into strategy. So I think it's really interesting and thank you for that. Yeah, my name's Kimberley. I am a Suzuki violin teacher in South London, England. I was a Suzuki child. I really had my Suzuki mommy very involved with me when I was learning to be a Suzuki teacher. And I think that gave me a real insight to the Suzuki parent part of the triangle, which I probably wouldn't have done for a much longer time as I was, I think just about 20 years old when I started the training very far off from thinking about being a parent myself.

So this was a really interesting step, and through the years I've gotten really interested in mental health psychology, child psychology. I have my PD set in psychology and neuroscience of mental health and working towards my master's in that, pulling that all together has been something that's been a real passion of mine is to try and help parents come up with a scientifically backed strategy route to being able to put that amazing Suzuki philosophy into practice in a modern day western world where some of those lofty ideals feel like it's not always possible. So yeah, that's been my passion for the last few years

Christine Goodner:

And I love, we'll talk a little bit about what you're learning related to music. I think it's so fascinating and also just science is learning and teaching us so much about the brain and nervous systems and how children learn that we can really, if we know more about that, we can use that to our advantage to make a better experience for our child if we're working with them, our students, and ourselves as the adults supporting them. So I think it's great to weave that in. I love that you're doing that.

Kimberley Wong:

I Think it's so important, isn't it, to really get to grips with all the modern knowledge that we have about how brains grow. And also what's so important nowadays in mental health research is understanding how big a role parents play in the development of our children's brains and how healthy their support system, and the way that they grow up to be resilient, is as well. So there's so much research into parent education just outside of everything, and it's great to know that in the Suzuki world, this was sort of a pioneering sector where we've already got parents involved and therefore we can start trying out these strategies straight away, which is fantastic.

Christine Goodner:

Exactly. And I think we have a lot of tradition in the Suzuki method and wanting to stay true to Suzuki's vision, but I think all of what's being learned about how children learn and how their brains develop, really the end results Suzuki was aiming at all of that gets us there. Maybe we tweaked some of our strategies to get us there in a really healthy, supportive way, but we're not changing that lofty vision of what we can accomplish through music. And I think it's great that we can incorporate this new information and still get to those same goals.

Kimberley Wong:

Absolutely. And from reading the literature that Dr. Suzuki has put out before his death, it's clear that he would want this movement to go in that way. This was clearly what he was interested in the whole time was how do children learn? So I can imagine that we're doing him proud hopefully by bringing these things in. Yeah,

Christine Goodner:

I would think so. I think so too. And just like the idea of growing noble hearts or beautiful hearts through music, if we're supporting a child's full development as a human being, then certainly that helps us do that.

Well, I think that's a good segue. I'd love to hear just what you've been learning about neuroscience and the brain and how it relates to music and music practice. I know it's a huge topic. We could talk about that for hours and hours on end, but if you just want to share a couple of things you've been learning you think would help people to hear, that'd be great.

Kimberley Wong:

Of course. So one thing that I've been diving into a lot recently is the idea of neuroplasticity. How do we grow our brains? How do we change the mapping of our brains? And it is a very hot topic at the moment, isn't it?

Alongside mental health in general, which is quite popular all over social media. I think people are starting to learn more and more. And those two things I think come hand in hand because something that is a really interesting topic is the way that your brain works to protect you.

So that is generally what your brain does, is it looks to protect you. So that means that instead of practicing solutions and trying to come up with solutions, your brain actually goes over problems because it's trying to make sure that you are prepared, particularly for those individuals who may have had some kind of perceived shocking news at some point in early life that they weren't aware of.

The brain is going to practice even more trying to figure out what the problems could be that could arise. But instead of trying to think outside the box and work a way around them, how do I get out of this? Your brain is just going to sit there and figure out how it could go the most wrong. Because if I can think of all the ways that it's going most wrong, then I can feel protected when I feel disappointed or upset or sad or whatever it is,

Christine Goodner:

The brain's just basically trying to look what could go wrong. How do I keep myself from not surviving what could go wrong?

Kimberley Wong:

Exactly. Similar to if you had tigers living in your city, you would want to know where those tigers were so that you could avoid them and you'd want to know everything about tigers if they were living near to you, et cetera.

What your brain probably isn't thinking about doing is, well, how do I learn to fight a tiger or outwit a tiger? Really, you are thinking all the ways in which to avoid them, and this is what happens in practice for a lot of children when something comes up that perceiving in their brain is going to be painful or frustrating or potentially even disappointing.

So it could be that review piece that took such a very long time to learn. I don't want to play it anymore. It took us such a long time to get there, even though I'm books ahead now, and that would actually be really easy for me, or that age old thing where we want the child to just play that bit five or six times, but because it's already gone wrong, the brain's thinking, well, if I do it again, it's going to make me feel bad instead of just, and how many times do we hear parents say, well, if they would just do what I asked them to do, we'd be done in 12 minutes

Instead of the half an hour of fighting that we've got. So the beauty about neuroplasticity is that your brain can change, and this happens all the way through your life.

We used to think that your brain stopped creating new cells after the age of 20 or 30 until quite recently, I think only 10 years ago, we discovered that neurogenesis where you grow your new brain cells happens all the way through your life. And so one of the things that's beautiful about the body is that by doing it, you can override that protective voice in your brain, and by doing it and moving your muscles, you can remap your brain to have essentially built bridges over where all of those tigers live so that you can go there and not get in danger at all.

So I think then it becomes this question of how do we get our children to go from saying no and practicing the problem to the neuroplasticity bit of remapping the brain and growing all of those pathways, isn't it?

Christine Goodner:

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's so helpful to think about. And I think one thing I've learned from Edmund Sprunger's work, for example, is that feeling of survival might be like, "oh, if my caregiver or my parent is frustrated with me, that threatens my survival. "That can cause stress. So that could be the," I don't want to play this and hear criticism that feels like a threat to my relationship with my parents or my caregivers" too. So yeah, it's all coming to mind as you're talking. I think that comes up in every practice for a lot of families.

Kimberley Wong:

I love that. And I think that is so true because even as an adult, I think it's something that's very regular to hear is most people don't want to hear their moms criticize them. I don't want to talk about this. I don't want to hear that from my mother, or whatever it is.

Christine Goodner:

Sure, sure. Yeah. I think it's really important to understand maybe when we see our own children, as a parent myself whose kids are grown, when we see our children acting in a way that doesn't feel logical, like this is easy for you. Why can't we just play it and move on? As you said, what would you say to families who maybe it's helpful to understand that, but then what do we do to help our child guide our child through that?

Kimberley Wong:

I would say play games. I think even in studios, I don't know about you. I know that you are a big game player in your studio, and obviously I am, so I'm showing them all the time. I'm bringing them up all the time.

But even then, even in an environment where we play a lot of games, I know that the families in my studio still find it difficult to pull those games out and use them even though they know they should. Because again, and this is again another topic we were talking about in my studio quite recently was they know they should do it, but it's again that whole brain protecting them thing.

The feeling of, "oh God, what if I pull the game out and then it doesn't work and I'm going to be so disappointed", or I'm going to put the game out and then my child's going to try and change all the rules.

Christine Goodner:

Yes, I hear that one. Yes,

Kimberley Wong:

And we're going to take too much time and then I'm going to get frustrated and I might shout and I don't want to shout at my child, et cetera, et cetera.

And I think that it's a valid point, that feeling of by putting in extra effort and playing a game with your children in a moment where you want to do work does feel like extra effort does feel like if you then get rejected, it's going to feel ever so much more difficult than the little fight in the first place to get those five repetitions done. But I really think that games are the way forward because children want to win

And they want to have fun. And that's what children do. They don't say I a bad, I've had a bad day. They say, will you play with me?

So if you can make it feel like, right, well, we've got to, however, at best it makes sense to your child. Some children love stories, but then my niece loves stories, so we have to tell the princess story, and in order to put the monkey to climb the tree, we have to do this bit five times. And if it falls off, then the monkey goes down one step. Oh, no. And we make it fun.

And again, I have to hold my frustration in check, but it's easier for me actually to hold my frustration in check when telling a story or I'm pretending to be a character. That doesn't mean I don't still have this moment before we play it where I go, oh no, I have to be inventive. And that's going to take up energy.

Christine Goodner:

Yes, yes. Yeah. I can see how that would sort of take the pressure off or feel less personal to the child maybe, and just help make it feel less high stakes, I guess, to play that thing for their parent.

Kimberley Wong:

So I think games are really important, but I also think doing the smallest bit can really, really be helpful. And I think that's really difficult, especially if you are not a musician embarking on this journey with your child.

Perhaps if you have some music background, it's easier to understand how you can break it down. But particularly for those parents who don't have any musical ability of their own because they never learn as a child, it can be really hard to understand. Well, it is still helpful just to do the two notes that your child does know and tomorrow you can build on it.

I think we do live in that society where everything we want to see progress all the time, day on, day on day, and the inundated with collages of videos that people have put together of day one, day 14, day 47, et cetera.

And it's hard to get away from those snapshots in time. Whereas a lot of the parents who come to my course, I do a parent course where we work through some of these strategies, half of teaching them to play a game is teaching them that the first day doesn't have to make progress. You just have to have fun and get over the hump as it were,

Christine Goodner:

Kind of change the feel or tone of practice or the relationship the environment a little bit.

Kimberley Wong:

Yeah,

Christine Goodner:

And I think if there's teachers listening, talking really specifically about how to break it down, I think I just realize the longer I teach, the more I talk about how to break it down when I'm anticipating getting to know a student and realizing there can be frustrations, I would rather hear You came back and you played three notes correctly than the whole phrase I assigned you. Then we fought with each other every day.

Kimberley Wong:

Oh, absolutely. And so then that, I would love to ask you about that then. So how prescriptive do you think we can get as teachers? Is there too prescriptive or do you think it's really worth saying, okay, you could do this day by day, this could be the prescription?

Christine Goodner:

I think it depends on the student. I'm not prescriptive with every student,

But as I get to know them, if I know ...I do invite people to tell me, I want to hear your frustrations, please tell me what's frustrating.

Then I get a sense of who needs that. And I usually just give them the smallest step to start with and then tell them to build from there. I'm not prescriptive on how they build, but I might say, if this feels like too much at home, sometimes when I'm in the room with the student, I'm giving some scaffolding or support, but it's kind of invisible.

I don't realize I'm doing it. And then when they go home to do it and I'm not there, it doesn't feel doable. So I do realize, okay, let's start with these three notes and then add more as you're able. So I guess I'm not prescriptive on how they build it, but I am prescriptive on the tiny chunk for some students that I think

Kimberley Wong:

Where the starting point is that's really useful.

Christine Goodner:

It's an interesting conversation. Yeah,

Kimberley Wong:

For sure.

Christine Goodner:

What about you? Do you talk about that?

Kimberley Wong:

I think it's very similarly to you. I like to show how far you can break down chunk and then the end goal, but then again, yeah, absolutely. There are absolutely families, and particularly I'm finding the families who have students who are neuro spicy, and you've written Neurodiverse in there if you've got a child with or a parent who has a DHD or autism, because sometimes it's not necessarily the child who struggles with the breakdown. Sometimes the parent can struggle with the idea of breaking down just as much as the child does or more that can feel very overwhelming if you are the person who's in charge of having to break it down. So for those families who might need more of a prescription, I have been

known to do it, but like you said, very rarely. And it's more a case of here's the beginning and here's the end. And I think making it very clear is very important, what you said about making it very clear of we don't have to get all the way to the end result, rather you did it well this way so that they understand what the goal is, I think is really, really important.

Christine Goodner:

And I want to take the stress away from we have to do this whole thing perfectly for the teacher next week. If they can, great. We're all thrilled. But I don't want there to be a stress about that. I just want them to be working it out. And I think the more stressed we are in practice, the less access the logical part of our brain and actually do the work.

Kimberley Wong:

Absolutely. All of that regulation stuff, and I think that's true nowadays. Parents really feel that pressure, don't they, to bring back the homework to the lesson as perfectly as possible. So to move on. And that totally makes sense when you have a three-year-old who you really are taking all the emphasis of the work for, isn't it? But as they grow older, I think we can forget as teachers to take that responsibility away and remind them of the scaffolding.

I love that idea with the scaffolding, and I know that a lot of teachers are talking about it at the moment, but I think it's so very important to say to a parent, look, it's not your job to bring back this whole section. Your job is just to help your child to get as close to it as possible. And I think finding the balance between pushing past the comfort zone so that the child is able to realize the full potential without putting that all on the parent, which I have to say is something that I don't always juggle well enough that I would like to juggle better.

Again, it's that thing of you don't get to see six days of the week at home. So it's not always clear who's taking most of the emphasis. I think this is definitely linked to what we were just talking about, not having the same understanding of the goal or the process of it can lead to a lot of frustration. That's obviously the first one, isn't it? If a parent assumes that, say they could break the whole of Happy Farmer back in one week, and the teacher is thinking, I'm really happy if you can pluck the first line and the child is thinking, I'm just happy I'm playing Happy Farmer, then we're all going to end up with slightly different levels of frustration as to why we're not at the end of the same goal. So I think as a teacher, we can be, as we've already said, so helpful to towards that frustration.

If we can be very clear about even what's the minimum? What's the minimum that you can bring back in order to progress? Well, this is it. And if that means that you only prioritize that because it's a funny week and so is visiting, et cetera, et cetera, that's really helpful rather than this very wide goal. And they've gone off and tried to do everything and the child hasn't understood why, and we come back and go, oh, there's so many holes to fill here. So I think being prescriptive about the minimum is very, very helpful. And I think there are certain things that we can all be thinking about that's so very helpful. For instance, what is the optimum time for all of us to be practicing? And of course that is going to be different for the adult as it's for the child. So in thinking about those things, and I think, I can't remember whether it was you who put up a post about this potentially it was what things do we absolutely need to have in order to practice well?

And I think that that was such an eyeopening way to think about it. And we started talking about that in my studio. Well, what things do our children need? Well, they need to have eaten. If it's after school, they need to have eaten something and they need to have had 10 minutes to sit down and think about nothing. Or it needs to be after dinner when dad can be looking after the little one. And what does it that the parent needs in order for optimum practice? I think not having something beeping in the

background or not having that deadline of, well, if we don't get it all done in 15 minutes, my boss is going to call and then I'm going to be very stressed. So something we talk about on the parent course a lot is adding frustration time to your practice so that you've got a buffer of extra time.

And that means that if you do only have a limited amount of time, say 20 minutes, you are not trying to get 20 minutes of work done, but saying, okay, well then if we are going to have a buffer of five minutes on each end to fuf and whatever, then we're really only planning on 10 minutes of work. So what's the minimum again, what's the minimum amount of stuff that we can get done in order to feel like we've made some progression and let's just start at the minimum and then worked outwards. So I think that this is something I've been building out with my teenagers as well.

It can feel so frustrating to have so much to get done. So we've started drawing it out like concentric circles like a dartboard and going, okay, well this week what has to go right in the center according to the lesson, what did we discuss? One or two things has to go in the center. So if you only have five minutes to practice, you've got to do those. And then we build out, and then we build out, we build out. And I think that's really helpful, particularly if you do have a child who's neurodiverse. If you always start, obviously we always want our children to start with a warmup, but if you have a child who takes 15 minutes always to get their brain in gear from doing the warmup, then maybe it's better to start with something else.

Christine Goodner:

Yeah, exactly. Yeah, fascinating. I know one thing we talked about maybe discussing today if we had time was about frustration in practice. So we've talked about that a little bit, but I just wonder, since you have such a depth of knowledge about neuroscience in the brain, I've heard you talk before about some of the things that might cause frustration in a student. I'd love to have you share some of that with us if anything comes to mind.

Kimberley Wong:

I think one of the other thing things that's frustrating that causes a lot of frustration is thinking about the way in which, for instance, dopamine or adrenaline and other neurotransmitters that hit your brain. And so because they pass through your prefrontal cortex as well, and a lot of that has to do with it. So as adults, we get that dopamine hit because we have fully formed part of your brain that tells you, go do this thing. So we get a dopamine hit when we've got where we ticked off the list of the hardest stuff. But quite often for a child that dopamine rush doesn't happen unless they feel like they've had fun or they've accomplished something. So it's actually very difficult to get again past that barrier of protection in your brain because it feels boring. And so we can often get the children to play boring things, but they're not really, their brains are somewhere else, again, to protect them.

But I think definitely growing up, it was one of the biggest causes of frustration between my mother and I was that I could be there with my body and my violin, but my brain, I was running through something that happened today or what I want to do next. And it wasn't until we hit the new stuff that I would click in because that was interesting to me. And of course we have other children who don't like to do the new thing because that's the bit that feels scary and boring, and they only want to play something very easy from a long time ago because that feels fun and smooth to them.

Christine Goodner:

I think that's a really important conversation because I think in Suzuki method where we are big on review and playing the pieces we already know and what you're saying rings really true, but then often as the parent practicing with a child, it feels like, well, they're bored with this, so we shouldn't do it



anymore. And when we know as music teachers, we do need to do it for these very important reasons. What would you say? How do we counteract that or what would you say would help with that?

Kimberley Wong:

Yeah, I think there's a few different things, and I'm going to bounce this question back to you as well because I'm really interested, but I think for me it's really understanding the child in front of you. So if you do have a child who, and there's going to be a lot of different things. If you have a child who can absolutely play all the way through their review pieces, they're just not thinking about it too hard. Perhaps the best thing to do would be to put the CD on and have them play along to something which is going to keep their brain in the right track. And then the frustrations come for those children because they've forgotten to repeat or they've taken the wrong loop. Whereas if you have a child who really struggles with the muscle memory and really struggles, then yeah, I do understand for those parents, it can feel like you spend 97% of your time trying not to forget everything.

And in which case, for those parents, I usually say just pick out the difficult chunks because to be honest, when are you really likely to hear them play those pieces all the way through, mostly in a group lesson or in a concert or a play together. So you just need to pick out the bits that they're most likely to fall off and just do those bits instead of hash out the entire of Minette two, which can feel forever for those children. That would be my suggestion. And on the other end, again, make it into a game. Can you turn it into a board game where you have to find certain ones or can you hide all the pieces of book one around the room and every day you're going to pick two, you're going to two of them and play those the next day you'll find two more, et cetera. I think that it's a combination thing of trying to keep the brain interested and understanding how the child in front of you works.

Christine Goodner:

I really agree with that. I think one thing I do ask parents to just rethink is that it's not bored because the songs are boring it, it's bored because their brain hasn't learned how to focus yet in the way we're asking them to focus. So it's not like, oh, this is boring for them, so advanced for this piece. It's that the amount of focus and the kind of focus we're asking them to do is advanced. Also, I think what you're saying is yes, case by case basis with students. So just introducing something like you're saying novel to catch their interest. So I even made cards one time and I'm a string teacher, so I was playing with the bow upside down or go to a different room of the house. You just pick different things, stand on one foot, whatever. It doesn't always work for pianist, that kind of thing, but something novel that's like, oh, I'm doing something different while I play this review piece. I think something like that can kind of catch their interest.

Kimberley Wong:

Oh yeah, absolutely. Can you play it with your eyes closed or stand on one foot, play it with one hand, and then swap if you're a pianist and Absolutely. And there's that amazing free app that you can get called Decide Now, and you can spin it and you can set it so that they don't come back to the same ones. And you can have two of those. And I know that that's a staple tool that a lot of parents find very easy to use because it's there on your phone and it doesn't feel like you have to crawl through the house looking for paper and pens.

Christine Goodner:

Yes. I think it's nice to have both choice. Some people love the technology, some people don't want to get their phone out, so either way there's an option.

Kimberley Wong:

Exactly.

Christine Goodner:

Yeah. But I think that something novel that catches, and that's the same for any student with focus issues, whether it's just young or they haven't learned it yet, or they have a DHD for example, and they may always have focus issues their whole life, just that novelty of just something different. I think if it's the piece that is a review piece and they know well, it's a good way to bring in something different for each one of those review pieces you're trying to tackle in a day, I do think that can help. And it feels less frustrating if we're talking about frustration as the parent or caregiver that you have a strategy to help them get through that thing. The teacher's assigning.

Kimberley Wong:

I think that for parents, the strategy is such a big word, having, it's that helpless feeling of this is going south and I have no idea how to turn it around. That's so difficult. But having a few tools that you can pull out of the box and go, okay, let's try this and see if it makes a difference, can often make the whole room calm down, isn't it?

Christine Goodner:

Right. As a parent myself who's practicing my kids, I can just feel like we're putting all this investment into this process and my child acts like they hate it every time we practice. I don't want to fight with my child every day. This really can be a lot of big feelings that come up as the adult in the practice room. So I think our message to you listening, if you're one of those parents is just, there's strategies that can help. It doesn't have to stay like that.

Kimberley Wong:

Oh, 100%. And I even say this in families where even my family, we all grew up in Suzuki kids and things like that, and my niece is only three, and yet when she runs away from her parents from practice, I can see that even though my sister's had me talking about this forever, we grew up Suzuki, she knows that it's going to be fine. I can see that in the moment. There's this feeling of, well, maybe we shouldn't do it. There's a natural panic that happens when your child rejects the work because you think, my gosh, maybe I'm doing the wrong thing. Maybe we're going to ruin our relationship, or they're going to hate music, or whatever it is.

Where the truth is that when you take a step back and you look at it, it's fine. We have many, many years to enjoy music making and we can all just work towards it the best we can. And when you take a very, very long view like that, there's a lot of relaxing that can come into it. I think that especially when children are so young and they've got such spongy brains and you can just see it. Everybody's like, we've got to do as much as we can with the sponge right now, and if we miss this opportunity, maybe we'll have missed out on something.

And I think that that can be such a recipe for frustration as well, that feeling of maybe I'm not doing it right, maybe I'm not living up to what we could be doing for my child. Whereas the truth is they're so young, life is long,

Christine Goodner:

Their attention spans. The length of time of focus is so short, and it will not be like that forever. I do think it's helpful to zoom out and just realize if we look a year in advance, if you could just measure how long could they focus in practice right now, any year from now, day to day. It's hard to see that. But there would be a huge amount of growth in my experience working with families.

Kimberley Wong:

Exactly. And it's much easier as a teacher because we see them once a week, whereas if you practice with someone every day, it's so much harder, isn't it, to see that the growth and the progress and everything else. So I think keeping in mind the long view is really, really helpful. Deciding to pick your battles, giving your children enough choice in practice. I think even from really young, if you don't put in one thing where I say, okay, now it's your turn and you get to choose, then they kind of grow up always thinking, well, practice is not part of what I have to think about.

And when it is their turn to start taking ownership and responsibility for it, it can feel really quite scary. So I think having that moment of being able to say, well, what do you choose what it is that we're going to do? And I like to throw in something as well, that's not instrument related, give me a high five, or Let's listen to your favorite song on the radio, or whatever it is so that children feel they have a little bit more ownership over the time and the space. And I think that that can also help to offset some of that frustration. A lot of frustration comes from just, well, I don't get to be in charge,

Christine Goodner:

Isn't it? Right? And one day we hope they're in charge of their own practice as they get older. So we're also giving them a chance to develop that skill in little tiny microscopic bits. Like you said, they might not have any idea how to make their own decisions in practice if we send 'em off practice on their own. And it was always just a grownup tells me what to do. So yeah,

Kimberley Wong:

Which is what happened to me.

Christine Goodner:

Sure.

Kimberley Wong:

We got to, and I love my teacher so much, we're still really close, but when I changed teachers at 11 years old, that was what happened. She said, right, mom's not come into the practice room. She's not to come into the lesson. And then it just was at least a year or two of my mom sitting in the kitchen pulling her hair out because she could just hear me starting from the beginning and going to the mistake and starting from the beginning and going to the mistake. And similarly, for me feeling incredibly frustrated because I knew I wasn't doing it right. But I hadn't paid enough attention with all those years of my mom helping me to realize how to practice either. So I think there's, getting that self-actualization into the practice can really help.

Christine Goodner:

Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. I'll just wrap up what we're saying now by saying if you're a parent or caregiver listening to this, I think just listening to podcasts like this that talk about practice and looking for resources out there to support it, because you do need your own support as well. Teachers need

support, parents and caregivers need support. The student needs support, of course. So I just wonder in that vein, Kimberly, if you could just share a little bit about where people can find you and what you do to support parents and families.

Kimberley Wong:

Absolutely. I am all over social media. I do give out little tips. I try to do it weekly. It depends on life. But I try to give out some practice tips here and there. You can find me, Kimberly Wong on most things, Kimberly Wong Violin studio. I have a website, [kimberlywong.com](http://kimberlywong.com). And if you are a parent who's looking to potentially look for some strategies as well, you can find out about our [course@kimberlywong.com](mailto:course@kimberlywong.com) slash toolkit, which stands for our Practice Parent Toolkit course, which is where we build out strategies specifically for you and your child, which is really exciting. But I also do want to say, don't forget to read Christine's books because they are a staple in our studio and really see that the parents in my studio who do read those books come away feeling really relieved and supported and with a really nice holistic view of how they can help their children and practice.

So you compare those two things together, and I think that would be my major tip for parents is, yeah, think of yourself as a scaffolding situation rather than the person who has to teach your child at home forever and ever. And of course, as they're younger, that might mean you need to take more of the lead. But if you're thinking about we're trying to get to a healthy teenager who can enjoy their instrument inside of a practice room, does that change the way that you talk to them in the practice room? It's a good question to ask.

Christine Goodner:

I love that. Well, thank you so much, Kimberly, for your time and for talking with us. I know such huge topics, so I hope people connect with you, and I'll put the links to your information in our show notes and on my blog where I have the transcript for this episode, and make sure people can connect with you. I think sometimes it's really great to have support from someone who's not your personal teacher. It just can feel a little less like I don't have to show the teacher we're doing things just right. Sometimes I find it's helpful as someone who's not the teacher you have to report to each week for practice homework to get support from. So I hope people will connect with you after our conversation today. Alright, pleasure to speak with you.

Kimberley Wong:

Thank you so much for having me. Bye everyone. Bye.

Before we go today here are three of my takeaways from my conversation with Kimberley. First of all I love that we're having so many conversations here about the brain and music practice – I think it's so helpful to understand some of the behaviors and reactions we see happening in the practice room.

One thing I'm taking away from this conversation is a reminder that our brain is constantly looking to protect us – I loved the analogy of there being tigers loose and how we want to build a bridge over them rather than trying to overcome them directly.

Two: I also loved Kimberley's idea of prioritizing practice tasks like a dartboard with concentric circles – with the must practice item going in the center and then building out from there with our students. I

think this is such a great idea. Prioritizing our practice is so important and something that students need to be coached through very often – I plan to use this idea with my own students as needed.

The third thing that really stuck with me was Kimberley Wong's concept of building in "frustration" time into our practice time – basically knowing that if we have 20 minutes, a chunk of that will be taken up by this and it won't be productive results 100% of the time. I was thinking about how Dr. Molly Gebrian was talking to us about breaks in practice – or time spacing out to let our brains do the true learning and how much of practice is aspects of practice like this that are 100% necessary and don't seem like using our time well if we just look at them on the surface.

If we're practicing, or teaching young children, that frustration time is helpful to expect so that we don't have unrealistic expectations and feel unnecessarily frustrated by things that are just human development and realities of practicing with human beings and not robots.

I think what music beautiful is the humanity and humanness of it but practicing through that can feel like a lot sometimes.

I hope this conversation gave you some good food for thought and ideas to to use in practice – I hope you connect with Kimberly Wong if you'd like to hear more of her ideas and tips about practice.

Please DO share this episode with anyone you think would benefit from hearing it and I'm wishing all of you in the time to practice community a wonderful week until I join you again next week.

Happy Practicing!

Transcribed by Rev.com