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What's in a Saying? The Music Teacher's Guide to Maximizing Meaningful Maxims, MythBusting Inaccurate Clichés, and DeBunking (Half) Truths

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It is all too common to hear familiar adages spouted by well-intentioned music teachers, parroted by students, or encountered in print or online pedagogical sources. Some well-known maxims are partially inaccurate while others are outright false. As such they can be detrimental to our students' progress and even harmful to technical or musical development. Words are powerful and the sayings, theories, and "facts" we share as teachers matter.

Dorothy Delay (1917–2002)¹

1. Kids Become What You Tell Them They Are
2. Teaching by Example
3. The Power of the Spoken Word
4. The Barrier of Fear
5. The Pleasure Principle
6. Perseverance
7. Making Plans; The Meaning of Discipline
8. An Unimpeded Vista

Frances Clark (1905–1998) and Richard Chronister (1930–1999)
Eight Fallacies and Eight Principles of Education²

The Teaching Maxims of Mrs. J. Spencer Curwen (1845–1932)³

The Power of the Spoken Word

1. Use words that invite action and improvement without implying judgement or failure
2. Avoid empty praise
3. Praise effort over ability
4. Acknowledge improvement meaningfully
5. Ask a question when you want an answer; give a directive when you want an action
6. Choose your words carefully as students believe you!
7. Sometimes silence is best.

Popular Clichés and Myths

1. "Practice makes perfect"
2. "10,000 hours of practice" or 10 years of practice lead to mastery
3. "No pain, no gain"
4. Learning Theory and the Meshing Hypothesis
5. Music Notation: Myths and Traditions

¹ From Chapter 3 in B. L. Sand, *Teaching Genius: Dorothy Delay and the Making of a Musician*.

² From Chapter 1 in E. Darling, *A Piano Teacher's Legacy: Selected Writings by Richard Chronister*.

³ There are 12 educational maxims listed in the beginning of Curwen's *The Teacher's Guide to Mrs. Curwen's Pianoforte Method*. Geoffrey Tankard includes additional maxims in his list of Mrs. Curwen's teaching maxims in his book, *Pianoforte Diplomas*.

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