

The Suzuki Philosophy and Practical Applications in the Music Studio/Classroom

Dr. Vanessa Mio (Assistant Professor of Music Education – Western University; Director – Windsor String Academy)
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- Shinichi Suzuki founded the Talent Education methodology in Japan - believed that all human beings are born with a natural ability to be successful at any task, provided that they are nurtured in an appropriate manner
- Suzuki observed that young children could speak Japanese fluently, and internalize both the language and the dialect by six years of age
- This led Suzuki (1983) to argue, “If a child speaks his language fluently, he has developmental possibilities. Other abilities should therefore develop according to the way he is raised” (p. 5).
- Suzuki’s pedagogical methodology introduces violin lessons first to the parent to learn proper violin posture and beginning repertoire
- Parent extends the lessons at home through modeling, imitation, and focused repetitions; playing recordings on a regular basis
- Rooted in the “building block” system of sequential learning; scaffolding
- Zone of proximal development - explains how children acquire skills when learning is propelled slightly ahead of development with the assistance and encouragement of a competent adult
- Memory – the lesson begins when the piece is memorised;
- Repetition – Brian Lewis (Mio, 2015) studied with Suzuki as a young child and explained his personal experiences:

Lewis reported that his teacher, Suzuki, said to “practice only on the days you eat.” This had a great impact on Lewis, as he “grew up learning . . . that food feeds our body and music feeds our soul.” that practicing was a necessary, integral function of everyday life.

He further explained Suzuki’s perspectives of practicing:

I was assigned things to do thousands of times a day. I had a bow flexibility exercise that I was assigned to do 10,000 times, and I always thought that in America that was a figure of speech—it means we do it a lot. But no no no, he wanted me to do this exercise 10,000 times a day. So, that by the time I had left, I had over the course of that month or whatever before we went to a different assignment, I had done more than a quarter of a million of these exercises. And why? Because my teacher had asked. If he would have asked me to do it 10 times, I would have done it 10 times. But how long would that have taken me to adjust my bow hold to get the desired result? So this type of repetition was great. I did it with the bow. I did it with chopsticks. I did it with pencils. I didn’t do it all the time with my bow, and that really helped to influence me a lot.

Suzuki’s assignments of practicing a technique 10,000 times a day emphasized his philosophical belief that one must practice many focused repetitions in order for the body to have complete mastery of a skill. Due to these intense practicing expectations, Lewis now believes that “I know full well what I need to practice, when I need to practice, and how to practice.”

- Positive attitude – responsibility of the instructor to understand the philosophy

Lewis explained Suzuki’s positive attitude, stating, “I loved my lessons with him. He was joyful, he was joyous.” Lewis stated that Suzuki did not focus on “whether kids went on to become professional musicians and go to Indiana or Juilliard. He was interested in making fine human beings. That’s really what he wanted to do, and thought that music [was] a great resource for that.”

Lewis (Mio, 2015) claimed:

It’s going to make me cry to think about the power that we have as teachers and sometimes the blasé attitude that people take about this type of psychological damage or help that they can give. I think that really great teachers manage to educate kids not just on how to play the violin, but how to be real human beings, how to deal with life. Violin teaches life to me . . . teaches great life skills. . . . I find that the teachers that are truly the most successful are the people who connect with their students on a personal level, and those students really feel like that teacher is involved with them.”

- Focused Listening – recordings
- Tonalisation exercises – importance of resonance in the sound

At 5 years of age, Lewis learned that “tone has a living soul without form,” and that the sound he made through his violin was alive.

Excerpts from *Helping Parents Practice*

Sprunger, E. (2005). *Helping parents practice: Ideas for making it easier*. St. Louis, MS: Yes Publishing.

- Importance of attending ALL lessons- including group classes, because: parents learn the important details of the practice assignments; how to practice and become the home teacher; how to have healthy expectations

Importance of Group Lessons:

- Important for young children to be around other kids in a social context who have the same interests and goals; for parents, opportunity to “vent,” share various practice strategies, and encourage each other
- Healthy competition
- Motivation
- Encourages future goals and ambitions when younger students watch more advanced children
- Opportunity to practice listening, playing together, staying focused amongst a class of distractions; creativity encouraged through improvisation
- Encourage students to play with confidence because they have a group of friends playing along with them
- Opportunity for teachers to have students practice various exercises or skills that they would normally frown upon in their private lesson
- Often reveal challenges to students who have neglected to practice
- Comfort of playing in front of an audience
- Teach children concert etiquette

Resources

Suzuki Association of the Americas www.suzukiassociation.org

Mimi Zweig String Pedagogy www.stringpedagogy.com

Vanessa Mio www.vanessamio.com

Contact Information

Dr. Vanessa Mio – vmio2@uwo.ca