

Would You Like To Learn About Suzuki Piano?

Reprinted by permission of the Suzuki Association of the Americas

What are some of the basic principles of the Suzuki philosophy of teaching?

Suzuki teaching is based on a philosophy of respect for the child. Dr. Suzuki has said "talent is not inherited, and the potential of every child is unlimited". All children are respected as unique human beings, and they are capable of developing their musical abilities as well as they develop their linguistic abilities. Some of the basic ingredients of the Suzuki approach are:

- Begin at an early age
- Move in small steps so that everything is at the child's level
- Initiate parental participation at all lessons so that parents understand the learning process and can be prepared to act as home helpers
- Expose the child to music via recordings, especially the music the child is studying
- Delay the reading of music until the child's aural and digital skills are well established
- Create an enjoyable learning environment, so that much of the child's motivation comes from pleasure
- Rejoice in all the child's achievements, no matter how small

What are some of the differences between Suzuki concepts and traditional teaching?

When Suzuki was asked why he taught, his reply was something like this: First, for the love of the child, second, for the love of teaching the child, and third, for the love of the music that is taught to the child, but the child always comes first.

In accordance with this philosophy, all aspects of the lesson are geared to the child. The length of the lesson, its pattern, its pace, its material, and the material assigned for home practice must all be appropriate for each child. As a result, lessons may last anywhere from a few minutes up to an hour.

Since pianos are designed in size for adults, young children must be seated very high with support for their feet. Posture is a very important factor. Also, in contrast to more traditional methods, all teaching is done completely from memory unless the child is at an advanced level. But perhaps one of the greatest differences is the parental involvement and the joy evolved from a family unit working together with the love of music.

Why is parental involvement so vital to Suzuki education?

The parents become the home helper; they must be well trained so that they feel secure in working with their children. Either the mother or father must accept the responsibility of daily practice as well as the daily listening to recordings. The teacher who sees the child usually only once a week provides inspiration and guidance to the family learning group. The teacher must be very sensitive to the relationship of each parent and child.

Is Suzuki teaching done only in group lessons?

This is a common misconception. Lessons are individual, with other students in attendance. Observation of the lessons of others completes the lesson time and is an integral aspect of Suzuki education. This observation allows both parties to learn

Would You Like To Learn About Suzuki Piano?

Reprinted by permission of the Suzuki Association of the Americas

first hand how a Suzuki studio operates and what will be expected of them. It also generates a natural enthusiasm and excitement within the child for "his/her turn at the piano". Since the piano is a solitary instrument, observation exposes the student to other children who are enjoying the same study and inspires a natural "I want to do what my buddies are doing too" attitude.

Do all students learn the same repertoire?

Yes, the basic repertoire is the same for all students. This has elements of great strength and motivation. However, some teachers give supplementary material which may help to widen the students' musical experience and help them to provide more style and variety in their performance.

Does the common repertoire create an unhealthy competitiveness among the students?

Competitiveness will only exist if teachers and parents make invidious comparisons among students. Perhaps the word 'competitiveness' should be replaced by 'cooperation'. If the teacher and parents will establish a tone of rejoicing in each student's accomplishment then the children will become very supportive of one another. This cooperation and supportiveness will become a strong motivation to perform well.

Should the repertoire be taught in the same order as the books present it?

Yes, one of Suzuki's major contributions to music education is the unique order of the repertoire. Each piece becomes a building block for the future. Difficult pieces are often followed by easier ones. The student is constantly aware of the challenge as well as the reward of meeting the challenge.

The literature is primarily Baroque and Classical. Why is this?

The music of these periods seems to have the greatest appeal and logic to children. It is harmonically simple and the structure is generally easy for a child to grasp. Because small children often find it difficult or impossible to use the piano pedals comfortably, this music is also appropriate since it requires little or no use of the pedals.

Some teachers like to expose their students to contemporary music. Is this contrary to Suzuki thinking?

Not at all. The spirit of Suzuki teaching may encompass all styles and periods of music. There is no reason why the teacher cannot record easy contemporary music for a young student to learn by ear. Also, it is suggested that some of the easier pieces by Bartok, Kabelevsky, Shostakovich or Tcherepnin may be used as supplementary materials for sight reading.

In Suzuki teaching why is there so much emphasis placed on the listening to recordings of the repertoire, as well as music in general?

Listening is not only the nucleus of Suzuki teaching, but it is the most essential element. It has been proven that the more the student listens to his records and tapes, the more quickly he learns the repertoire. This entire Suzuki philosophy is

Would You Like To Learn About Suzuki Piano?

Reprinted by permission of the Suzuki Association of the Americas

based on the concept that a child can learn his "mother tongue" from constant listening and repetition. The disciplines of listening and repetition seem to give the young child a sense of security and will help introduce him to the elements of self expression and self identity.

When are students first introduced to reading music?

Many teachers expose children to the symbols of music from the very beginning. Children take great delight in learning to draw clefs, notes, rests and other musical symbols. They love books and are curious about them. However, the teacher should refrain from giving the student formal reading material until the motivation level is very high. The general consensus is to start teaching reading when the child is in Suzuki Book 2. This gives the child time to develop his aural and digital skills and he is then capable of reading easy supplementary pieces. Reading should be very carefully integrated into the child's curriculum.

Is there any difference in the quality of reading with the Suzuki student, as compared to the traditional one?

If the Suzuki teacher accepts the responsibility of presenting music reading correctly and thoroughly, the Suzuki student will develop reading skills much more quickly and thoroughly than the traditional one. Also, he will have the ability to transfer music to memory in an amazingly short time.

What are the qualities of a good Suzuki piano teacher?

- Possessing the skills of a good musician - knowing what should be done, why it should be done and how to do it
- Enjoying the company of people, especially children
- Using imagination, fantasy, and whimsy while maintaining a sense of humour
- Being aware of the student's message and then following his or her lead by guiding each child from that point
- Being flexible for every youngster is different
- Being willing to experiment, always trying new ideas and techniques (Suzuki is an approach, not a method)
- Being honestly positive and enthusiastic while rejoicing in each child's accomplishments (praise is the greatest reward!)

How can a traditional piano teacher become a Suzuki teacher?

The best way is to observe a qualified and experienced Suzuki teacher over a long period of time. An apprenticeship to such a teacher would offer a teacher trainee an invaluable experience. During the summer months, Suzuki Institutes are held at various parts of the country. Many of the Institutes offer Suzuki Workshops. Potential piano teachers should observe Suzuki string teaching as well as piano. Becoming a master teacher is a lifetime project and requires constant study and growth by every teacher dedicated to the Suzuki philosophy.