

Foreword

“The Destiny of a Child is in His Parents’ Hands”

Education begins the day a child is born. As an infant’s body grows day by day, its powerful life-force absorbs all the stimuli it receives externally, developing in the process of acquiring ability. Without stimulus to the life-force, there will be no development in the child. Under conditions of neglect, nothing and no one can grow.

For more than forty years of experimental pedagogy, I have come to know without a doubt that ability is not inborn. Please raise your child to be a fine human being. Heart and ability depend entirely on the manner of nurturing. Everyone knows how important it is to cultivate seedlings with care, yet some parents are inattentive and indifferent to their children’s development. Without exerting any effort, they resign themselves to the thought that, “My child was born this way.” I hope you will not repeat this lamentable mistake from past eras of human civilization.

Please consider the fact that your child is developing the ability to speak with complete ease and that children the world over develop the wondrous ability to master their own native language. Does not every child develop marvelous abilities? Similarly, any child properly nurtured will develop abilities in other areas besides language acquisition. From my research of the pedagogical methodology of mother-tongue acquisition, I have created an educational approach known as the “Suzuki Method.” Just as every child has the potential to develop tremendous abilities in the mastery of his mother tongue, each child has been imbued with the potential to develop musical abilities. Please do not fail to nurture your child. It is a mistake to think that your child’s future is only a matter of heredity or inborn qualities. In response to the skill and ingenuity of the nurturer, any child can be fostered to achieve a high level of ability.

Children will grow according to this “Law of Ability.” Everything depends on the method of nurturing. The same method may yield different outcomes in different children. Every child has the potential to develop ability in any field, at least to the level of his ability to master his mother tongue. Every child is a wonderful creature, a precious being. Please give your child the opportunity to be nurtured, and please explore the best ways to nurture him.

Shinichi Suzuki



The Five Conditions for Ability Development

1. An early start
2. A superior environment
3. A commitment to practice
4. A superior instructor
5. A thorough teaching method

Study Points

1. Nurturing superior musical sensitivity

Provide your child with the opportunity to listen as much as possible every day to the companion CD of the pieces he will learn. When students are familiar with pieces before they study them, they are, in essence, developing internal abilities. This is the best method for fostering motivation. Once motivation is in place, your child will practice with enjoyment and develop nicely. The violin is a medium for cultivating human character, ability, and heart.

2. Tonalization

Vocalists practice a pedagogical exercise called Vocalization in order to nurture beautiful, refined voices. Their lessons start with Vocalization exercises to develop quality and power in their singing voices. With instrumentalists, as well, it is vital for teachers to lead their students in Tonalization exercises at each lesson. At home, too, students ought to practice for tone so that they develop ever finer ability.

3. Developing a balanced posture

Always strive for accurate intonation, a balanced posture, and a natural bow hold.

4. Creating motivation

Parents and teachers alike must foster the child’s motivation so that he will practice with enjoyment and good will.

Lessons at the Studio

Individual lessons

Just because a child has learned to play a piece with solid technique doesn't necessarily mean that he should progress to the next piece. This is because he can still improve. We must tell the child, "Now that you can play the piece, let's get to what is important. We're going to work on expanding your ability." This means improving tone, posture, rhythm and musical sensitivity.

Another important point is that when a child has mastered piece A and has been assigned to the next piece B, he must not stop practicing piece A. Instead, the child should practice both pieces A and B. The child develops his ability even further by continuing to review old pieces whenever a new piece is added.

The length and timing of a lesson may vary depending on the child's level of concentration. Additionally, it is essential for parents and children to regularly observe other children's individual lessons.

Practice at Home

It is the daily practice at home that leads to ability development. The key is how much and how well the student practices the teacher's instructions. It is crucial that parents understand how to guide their children's hearts and provide a motivating environment without anger or negative criticism. When it comes to Mother-Tongue education, all children grow up immersed in the joy of speaking their native language. Not one child quits midway out of frustration or boredom. The Suzuki Method borrows its fundamental pedagogical principles from those of Mother-Tongue education.

Tuning

Tuning is the foundation of a performance. Always tune your strings because it is central to the proper cultivation of accurate pitch and tonal sensitivity.

Among the tuning devices available on the market is an electronic tuner that measures levels of pitch with a meter. Once you have acquired the capacity to hear pitches accurately, it is fine to tune your strings to a properly tuned piano or to other electronic and handheld tuning devices. But in the beginning, it is simplest to utilize a device equipped with a meter.

In order to facilitate tuning on smaller violins, it is necessary to attach fine-tuners to each string. (Some tailpieces have fine-tuners built into them.) E strings, regardless of the size of the violin, are equipped with fine-tuners.

For tuning at the beginning level:

Note: Initial tuning should be the responsibility of the teacher, or at home by the parent as instructed by the teacher.

First pluck, and tune the A string, then tune D, G and E strings. Re-check the A string, since it is sometimes affected by adjustments to the other strings. Repeat these steps until all of the strings are in tune. Always tune all four strings.

When tuning with the pegs, push them slightly inward first so they will stay in place. However, if you push the pegs too hard, they will get stuck. It should be noted that temperature and humidity can affect the movement of the pegs. If the pegs are unresponsive, it helps to apply a product such as peg compound (available from violin dealers) to them. When the pegs pose difficulties regardless of the climate, they must be repaired.

For the delicate adjustments required to tune a smaller violin, use the fine-tuners. Using the fine-tuners is also appropriate on instruments of any size when a minute change of pitch is all that is necessary.

The position and angle of the bridge are also important. A contorted bridge makes tuning difficult and muffles the tone.

There are many types of strings. Find four well-balanced strings that fit your instrument.

Once a student is able to tune his own instrument, he should begin by carefully tuning the A string, and then tune the other strings, playing two strings at a time to achieve perfect fifths.

Maintenance

Violin

The violin is very sensitive to changes in the environment. One might say that the conditions optimal for human comfort are equally desirable for violins. Be especially careful to avoid extreme temperatures and excessive humidity or dryness: for example, leaving the violin inside a car in the summer or winter, in an extremely humid or arid location, or in direct sunlight.

After practicing the violin, use a piece of soft fabric (without chemical treatment) to clean off all traces of rosin and sweat. Also remove any rosin from the strings.

To ensure good tone quality and accurate intonation, change the strings at least twice yearly. Change only one string at a time. Sometimes a string may break while you are playing, so it is advisable to keep an extra set on hand.

After repeated tuning of the strings, the bridge may start to lean. It is therefore necessary to correct the angle of the bridge and to make sure its feet are flat on the violin.

Whenever the violin is stored for an extended period, the tension of the strings should be released slightly.

Bow

The bow requires the same attention to environmental conditions as the violin.

Before using the bow, tighten the bow hair by using the screw and apply rosin to the entire length of the bow hair. Be careful not to knock the rosin against the frog, or the rosin will crack. Depending on the kind of rosin, particularly with a softer type, you must be careful not to let it melt in high temperatures.

Wipe off any rosin and sweat from the bow stick after you have played. Unwind the screw slightly to loosen the hair but only to the point where the hair is still evenly distributed over the stick. Have the bow re-haired whenever the hair wears out. Be careful not to touch the hair.

