

Parents as Partners 13

(Parents as Partners is a program started by the Suzuki Association of Americas in 2011. Teachers and parents sign up for the videos through the Suzuki Association and watch them between February and the end of June.)

Phaela Tracy – **How a Package of Markers Can Transform Your Practice**

When preparing for a recital, a good method of practice is to use a box of markers and a graph with 5 squares by 6 squares. Pick 3 colors, one for good, one for great, and one for WOW! Color in a square for every attempt of playing the piece. Only record the practice times that were at least “good” (no “rats”). Be picky enough, but not too picky. This technique fosters self evaluation and helps the child want to make each playing of the piece better than the last one.

Ed Sprunger – **Breakdowns** As in car repair, a parent can't fix a problem with a breakdown in lessons or practice unless he or she understands the problem. The parent is in this relationship with the child for life. Here are some suggestions:

1. Figure out what is causing the breakdown. Keep your eyes and hearts open for more information
2. Does the child have too much on his plate? The child needs to chew information and digest it. Maybe there is too much information too soon.
3. Is this a phase? Look at the behavior through the lens of child development. Children at 2-3 years are just learning boundaries. They get into trouble in order to find out where the boundaries are. Children at 4+ enjoy developing skills. They want you to “Look at what I can do!” So, don't take away their joy. Children at 4-5 years sometimes feel very small. You need to give them hope.

Peter Ruterma has written “Every child talks in code. It is the parent's job to break the code.” Children signal what is going on through their actions, behaviors, and responses. Parents can change the way they interact to the breakdown. They can ask, “What can I control”. Is it possible to have joy in life? Am I capable of growing and adapting to this situation? Relationships require maintenance.

Heather Watson Hardie – **Making Failure Impossible**

These suggestions work with Perfect Suzuki Students (people pleasers) and not so Perfect Students (those who have some behavior issues).

1. Say, “I wonder how many Twinkles I can Play before you unpack your violin?”. This makes kids want to do something, not feel forced into it.
2. Repetitions: Don't assign the number of times, say, “How many times do you think you can do_____?” “I don't know, let's find out.”
3. Give choices, but choices you can live with. Make sure there is no “no” answer.
4. Learn to play the instrument. Parent uses the time to practice. Start to play and the child will come. Say, “Oh, that was so much fun. I really like playing the cello.”
5. Give kids as much control as possible. Show progress as much as possible.
6. Use index cards with tasks to be done. They can choose the order of the cards.
7. Put sticks with numbers in a jar to choose the number of repetitions.
8. Don't speak much. Model and show. Hunt for the notes in a song. Share new part of a song as a secret. Use the word “try” instead of play so there is no pressure.

9. Help children have fun with music. Share your love of the child. Share your love of music. Listen, try listen, try. Laugh.

Lamar Blum – **Character Development: Dressing for Life**

The Suzuki environment helps children to develop character like putting pieces of clothing on a doll:

1. Dress: Students appreciate the struggles of others when they have struggled themselves.
2. Pants: They gain a sensitive way to listen.
3. Socks: They learn to honestly evaluate their own pursuits.
4. Hat: They know how to have a dialogue with others.
5. Purse: They have a sense of appropriate behavior and good manners.

Ed Kreitman – **Defining Progress** – Why are you taking lessons?

Ed asked several groups of parents about the qualities they wanted their children to develop. Each group came up with similar lists. They were not interested in having their children become professional musicians. They wanted their children to develop life-skills around their instrument. These parents wanted their children to develop:

1. Poise and the ability to present themselves in public, whether speaking or making music.
2. Problem solving skills with confidence in the face of struggles.
3. A life-long love of music.
4. Ability to break complex problems down into small steps.
5. Fine motor skills and good hand-eye coordination.
6. A sense of endless possibility.
7. Ability to open doors of opportunity.
8. A healthy sense of self esteem tied to feelings of accomplishment.
9. Striving for excellence.
10. Ability to transfer music's unique learning skill set to other subjects.
11. An Individual voice on their instrument which would allow for self-expression.
12. Self-confidence.
13. Ability to create something beautiful.
14. Sensitivity to beauty in the world.
15. A positive emotional experience between parents and children built around the study of music.
16. Ability to manage time efficiently.
17. A choice of a social circle of friends who enjoy making music together.
18. Ability of memorize well.
19. A sense of calmness and centeredness.

Ed Kreitman emphasized that students are developing skills necessary to learn the next piece, but not just acquiring knowledge. He quotes Dr. Suzuki who says in Where Love is Deep, "Our purpose is not to create professional musicians, but to create persons of beautiful mind, and fine ability."

Dr. Suzuki also says in Nurtured by Love, "If one is able to play a piece of music, there will follow in rapid succession other pieces, but just 'playing through' many pieces is not good training if there be no one piece that is really played excellently."

Ed Kreitman stresses the purpose of review is to develop skills. Skill is knowledge x 10,000 times. Kreitman says that skill is “To do the task consistently with ease”.

You should break down the task into 3 “C’s”:

1. Comprehension – you must understand the task.
2. Cooperation – Parts of the physical body works with the mind.
3. Constructive repetition of the skill. Practice when you get it right, then 10 more times.

Artistic playing = Beautiful tone, played in tune and in time. Children learn the dialect of their own area, so they can learn the subtleties of the music line of their pieces.

Each new piece is built on the skills learned in the piece before. We are learning skills, not just pieces.

Carrie Reuning-Hummel – **Practicing With Your Child**

Although Carrie said, “It is like taking a floodlight and magnifying all the challenges we have with our children, the Suzuki Method is the best gift we can give ourselves”. Carrie knew what she was getting into when she started working with her children on Suzuki instruments since she was raised as a Suzuki child herself. She would not have missed it for the world. She knew that the Suzuki Method works, but the complexity of it is overwhelming. Parents need to follow all the steps.

1. Before you start, know yourself as a parent. Don’t try to live through your child. Know that the struggle is worth it and you can stick it out. Take a moment for yourself each day to ask, “Why am I doing this today?”
2. Do what the teacher asks in all aspects. Doing something 20 times is easy. Listening and reviewing every day are hard. Listening is like downloading information into a system. When a note comes out wrong, the child will know. Review lets the left side of the brain relax and the musical right side come out. It brings beauty into the words. When you have a busy week, it is better to let the new stuff go and concentrate on review. Just tell the teacher what has been happening.
3. You are your child’s “Practice Partner”. Ask the child what they need from you each day. Don’t try to solve all the problems in one day. Ask the child what he thinks and how he thinks a problem can be solved, rather than telling them the solution. Ask the student how many times something should be played. For instance if he says “2”, only allow him to play it 2 times. Try it the next day. Let him judge the results. Ask again how many times he needs to play it to get good results.

Sherry Cadow – **Tried and True Teaching Tips.**

1. Establish practice habits. Consistency is more important than length of practice. Start with small periods of time, then increase the time by small increments each week. Start out with a grid of stickers to put on a chart (30 boxes). Let the child have a reward at the end of the chart. It could be a trip to the Dollar store.
2. Practice in the morning before school. You can use as much time as you have time in the morning, then finish in the afternoon. Make a check list for the night before to save morning time. If you don’t get everything finished, you can practice more after school. For 2 children, 1 practices while the other eats and watches a practice video.

3. Use videos along with CD's to learn new pieces. The teacher can make a video of the piece with correct bows, interpretation, etc. The students will learn the pieces faster with correct bowing.

Jane Kutscher Reed – **Teaching Your Child Responsibility and Allowing Him to Own His Practice.**

The Role of a Practice Partner is to be excited about learning, not be a practice policeman. As Dr. Suzuki tells us, we are trying to nurture fine and noble human beings with beautiful hearts and excellent abilities. This is a great opportunity. Through our actions, we can teach our children to be polite or disruptive, grateful or entitled, kindly to others or full of “road rage”. If we always tell our children what to do and make choices for them, the children become defensive or argumentative, frustrated, and not learning centered. When we ask questions and let children make choices, they learn to think and reflect. Learning from mistakes gives children confidence.

Some ways to give life skills for success:

1. Create a loving environment where children are secure in love and can make mistakes and explore.
2. Be a role model and be what you expect the child to be. Set an example that they want to emulate by being on time.
3. Be excited about your job and the positive possibilities at work.
4. Stop telling and start asking questions and allow children to make choices.
5. Choose when practice time will be and honor the agreements.
6. Follow directions. Have a practice chart and follow it so the child knows what to expect.
7. Know that mistakes are opportunities. Say, “I’m sorry that happened. How can you fix it?” Ask permission to give ideas.
8. Give positive statements such as, “Some children would practice as fast as they can and hope no one notices the mistakes.” Some children will play slowly and carefully until they get it right.” “I am going in the other room. When you think you have it, call me back.” When they do call you back, ask, “How did that work?”