

Parents as Partners 2015

(**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 January and the end of June.)

1/15/15 **Brittany Gardner** - Advice and Encouragement for Suzuki Parents – Brittany Gardner was a Suzuki child, has been a teacher, and is now a parent. As a parent she sees all possibilities and limitation and knows the journey. This is her advice: 1. Believe in the capabilities of the child. 2. Work as partners with the teachers and follow through on activities. 3. All choices have consequences. If there are too many activities, your music experience will have different outcome. 4. Peer groups are important for child and parents. Brittany's childhood quartet members are still friends as adults. 5. Best practice is consistent practice. There is no substitute for repetition. **Use 3 colors of cards for tasks to be done before school (green), after school (pink), and by the child alone (yellow).** 6. Let the child try and learn by making mistakes. 7. Practice is meant to produce growth. It will happen if consistent, patient, effort is made. 8. Adapt to the growth of the child and change the way practice is done at different stages.

1/15/15 **Ed Kreitman**, Western Springs School of Talent Eductaion – Ownership

How do you get your child to want to polish a piece?

The Suzuki Triangle changes over time: The balance between the child, the parent, and the teacher shifts. Our goal is to help the child find his or her own voice on an instrument.

1. In the beginning stage, all the decisions about the instrument are made for the child by the parent and teacher. The parent needs to decide before beginning the instrument whether they can put in the time and effort necessary for success.
2. In the middle stage, the student can make some decisions.
3. In the final stage students take full responsibility of ownership of the practice and results.

Motivation changes over time:

1. In the beginning stage, extrinsic motivation may be necessary. This means motivators other than love of playing like rewards or punishments. A child will study to pass a test, or to prepare for a sporting event to win an award, or clean his room to avoid a punishment. Some children already have intrinsic motivation and play or read or sing or paint just for the love of it
 - a. These motivations may be a treat or snack, a celebration dinner, a chart, a high 5, praise.
 - b. External rewards help children learn new skills or knowledge.
 - c. When high standards are set, they give him feedback, allowing him to know how well he is doing
 - d. The downside is they may make play seem like work if he already enjoys the activity.
 - e. Lavish praise for minimal work is harmful
2. In the middle stage, we start to transfer ownership. We can ask the questions that promote autonomy:

- a. Can he isolate smaller skills and take pride when he achieves them: Can you make a good bow hand throughout the piece? Can you get a beautiful tone through the piece?
 - b. This is relational: Group class and relations to others is very important.
 - c. Gives purpose: Helps the student recognize the importance of playing well.
 - i. Offer focused feedback – “Your bow hand was really nice throughout the piece.”
 - ii. Begin practice with the easy material to set up success.
 - iii. Find models to show what to do. Watch others to see what not to do.
 - iv. Video with an Ipad so the child can see how they sound and look themselves.
 - v. Take copious notes at the lesson so students know exactly what to do at home.
 - vi. Take 2 minutes at the beginning of practice to set goals for the day.
 - vii. Tell the child how much you enjoy listening to them and put value on their hard work.
3. Complete ownership comes with autonomy. This comes at different times for different students. At the beginning of the year when the student is about age 12 and in Book 5, Ed Kreitman discussed with them whether they want to continue playing the instrument or not. (The end of Book 1 is not the time to discuss this because the student does not know how to play the instrument yet.)
- a. He talks about the time and effort the student has already put into the instrument.
 - b. He asks, “What would you miss the most if you no longer played this instrument?”
“What other activities would you substitute if you no longer play an instrument?”
 - c. He asks, “How does playing make you feel?”
 - d. “What are your goals?”
 - e. Autonomy, mastery, social aspects such as friends at school or group play a part.
 - f. “You are unique, important, special, and rare when you can play an instrument well.”

1/26/15 **Kathleen Spring** (Denver Teacher Trainer, violin) - [Is My Child Talented?](#)

Dr. Suzuki’s use of the words talent and ability is meant in broad sense and refers to an individual’s ability to think or feel in a given situation. He talks about *Ability Development, The Mother Tongue Method, Talent Development, Talent Education*.

The man on the street thinks talent is a special gift. Most people think they have or don’t have it. Since it is a gift, it doesn’t need work

Talent can be learned or developed. To achieve it, we need to be able to hold large quantities of music in our head or *audiate* the music. Some children call it “brain humming”. If you can sing “Happy Birthday” in your head, you are audiating.

After you can sing the piece, the next steps for learning to play a piece:

1. Hunt: The ability to play by ear easily comes out in the fingers if you can hear the song in your head. This should be followed by note reading. Children should be allowed to hunt for the melody. Ear to finger hook-up is important. Let students stumble and make missteps as they develop their neural map of the instrument. Sing or hold the pitch so the child can hunt for the

next pitch. Learn the “Previews” first, then let kids fill in between the previews by ear. Listen, clap, dance the music as you sing it. Don’t say the finger number. Parents are amazed when kids learn this way.

2. Playing by ear is not enough. Kids next need to play by memory and keep in mind all the extras like form shifting, dynamics, pitch etc.
3. Listen to the tone. Tone has a living soul. Play by heart and with heart.
4. Build a big heart. This is talent. Children are gifted because someone gave them the gifts of lessons, support, encouragement and love.
5. Talent Development is like a Christmas tree: The bottom layer is the ‘skirt’ of listening and singing. The trunk is the basic technique that holds up the tree. The branches are “playing by ear”. The ornaments are “playing by memory”. The star on the top is the ability to perform. Children are “gifted” because someone gave them the gifts of lessons, support, encouragement, and love.

1/26/15 **Diana Volokda Staggs** - Real Review: Using Listening and Review to Build Technical Skills

Review is challenging because it takes lots of time and causes children to lose interest if done mindlessly. If done correctly it is very valuable.

Definition of Review: It is a formal assessment of something for possibly change. It is looking at something carefully. It is a fresh study of material.

Decide why you are doing review. Is it for a concert or recital? Is it because you have lost a piece that you once know? Is it to gain new techniques from an old piece?

Recitals: Children in Books 1 -3 choose review pieces 7 pieces before current piece. Children in Book 4 + choose one 5 pieces before the current piece. Choose the next recital piece immediately after the previous recital and work on it for a long time

System of preparing review piece effectively and quickly:

1. Attach a grade to the piece: A – No errors and ready for a new stage of development; B- 2 errors or less; C – more than 2 errors, but child can play to the end; D – cant play to end.
2. For B, C, D, pieces, **child and parent listen to the piece actively** “shadow bowing “it or swaying to it. For B pieces, listen 2 times. For C pieces listen 3 times. For D pieces, listen 4 times.
3. All new pieces are D pieces and need to be listened to 4 times at each practice session.
4. Find sections (up to 3) that need attention. These sections need 15 repetitions per day. Play the following Game:
 - a. Make a number chart from 1 – 25. Circle the number when the repetition is correct. Cross out the number if the repetition is not correct. Continue until there are 15 correct repetitions.
 - b. Repeat each day until the child can get 15 repetitions without missing.
5. The goal is to advance the piece 1 grade each lesson.
6. The child must know the rules of the game and the role he/she is playing:

What role are you playing? Someone is on stage, is the performer. Someone is in the seats, is the audience. Someone is backstage and is the coach. **If the parent says what is wrong and adds reminders, the child is in the audience and the parent is on stage.**

How to gain new techniques from an old piece: Trace techniques back through the Suzuki literature to earliest stages of development.

Layer skills until they are mastered. Each piece is built on pieces before. Review, listening, and repetition will develop these skills. Unlock the freedom to play with expression and high musical ability.

2/2/15 – **Mark Mutter** – Raising Independent Musicians

Success equals independence, if you have the tools to success and if the path is drawn up clearly. We let children make mistakes, but we set them up for success. We should give constructive criticism, but not meaningless praise. The best way to give praise is for something concrete like “I love how your 2nd finger knew where to go today”.

If tasks or challenges are given in small steps at the child’s level the task will be accomplished.

Simple Steps:

Week 1 – Each child carries his own instrument.

Week 2 – Start to get the instrument out of the case and set up.

Week 3 – Each student will pick a part of the lesson to practice the next day.

Week 4 – Look for an opportunity for the child to figure out problems on his own.

Week 5 - Have some kind of reward if the child chooses a time to practice on his own.

Week 6 – The child chooses 3 or 4 songs to review so he will enjoy Group Lesson more because he knows the pieces.

Week 7 – Remind yourself and your child why you are doing this. Independence leads to freedom which leads to joy which leads to a beautiful heart.

Week 8 – Review all of the steps.

2/2/15 – **Jennifer Burton** – Play it Again Sam: How to implement Listening in Home Practice

There are 2 kinds of listening, Passive and Active. Passive listening is just having the music in the environment. Active listening involved clapping to a pulse, dancing to the music, tapping the foot, following the notes on the page.

Listen whenever possible such is in the morning, after school, all over the house.

Listen over night with an endless loop setting on an I-pod.

Listen in the car, house, van, wherever the child is.

How often? You can't listen too much. Put the music on your I-pad or I-phone or other device.

What to listen to: Enrich the Suzuki literature with other volumes of Suzuki, other CD's like "Bethoven at Bedtime".

Question: "Whose responsibility is it to get students listening?" Answer: "The parent's responsibility".
Listening is the #1 thing you can do to help your child so he can self-correct.

Apps for slowing down music so the child can play along:

Anytune for Apple (Free or \$14.95)

Amazing Slow Downer for Android 4.0 and above. This will work on Kindle. (\$14.95)

Others: Audipo: Audio Speed Changer (Free); Music Speed Changer (Free)

2/9/15 - **Ed Springer** – Pardon the Interruption: Learn music by **inside singing** to find the notes through the instrument. Ear-hand coordination from the ear is the most important thing. Interruptions break this process. There are times to interrupt: 1. A mistake that is distracting to the child like when the intonation is so far off that he doesn't hear the melody or 2. If the skill being practiced is wrong. There are different ways to interrupt: 1. Flat out stopping him is the worst. 2. When the child stops himself, you can comment or stop him at the end of a phrase or sentence. 3. Touching him is a good way to get his attention as long as it is a "whisper touch". Then apologize for the interruption. 4. Hand signals work occasionally. 5. Use games: "Can you get to the frog at the end of each bow?" Child gets a card if he does it right. If he is playing a little out of tune, try finger tapping games where he places the next finger in the correct spot repeated times. Compulsive criticism is not helpful. If the child is trying to fix something, leave him alone. If he has learned the wrong notes, let him discover that from the recording or in group class.

2/23/15 **Phala Tracy** – More Creative Color Coding to Review – When you play review pieces, research how they are now and color code them according to how you play them. Use pink for "Great", blue for "OK", and grey for "Gloomy". Try to get them to the next level. Another idea: Research your pieces and color code them through the color chart from yellow (Great) through green to blue (OK) to purple to red (EEEE!). This separates the student from the performance and allows him to decide how he is playing and notice which pieces need work. Tackle the "green" pieces first to get them to "yellow". Keep playing all the pieces and work on getting them all to "yellow".

3/2/15 – **Susan Baer** – The Sound of Optimism – At the core of the Suzuki Philosophy is the idea of developing fine individuals with beautiful hearts. This goal is developed by 1. Focus, work hard, perseverance. 2. Tackling challenges, not seeing failures. 3. Having optimism to inoculate against depression. 4. Making music friends who provide support. 5. Doing disciplined daily practice which is the scaffold for future success. Susan Baer presents some things that we can do to promote optimism. 1. Give the child responsibility for tasks he can do. 2. Give a 5-minute warning before starting practice. 3.

Point out things the child is doing well in a 3;1 ratio of positive to negative feedback. 4. End practice by recapping what he did well. 5. Break up practice into tiny steps. 6. Use “we” instead of you as inclusive language. 7. Refer to body parts instead of the whole person as “Your fingers need to know where they are going in this passage”. 8. Ask questions so the child can figure things out for himself, then wait for answers as in “What is your instrument telling you about tone?” 9. Intensely focus on 1 point at a time. 10. Let some things go. 11. Prioritize skills. We don’t want the child to get learned helplessness. The pessimistic child thinks in terms of permanence like “I always do...” The optimistic child thinks in terms of “Sometimes...” or “Lately...”. The pessimistic child blames himself. The optimistic child thinks that he succeeds because of his hard work over time. The optimistic child takes ownership of his mistakes and then fixes them. Children should not shoulder the blame of everything. Many of these ideas are from Martin Soloman’s book, The Optimistic Child.

3/2/15 - **Sherry Cadow** – Tried and True Practicing Tips – See 2013 Parents as Partners

3/9/14 – **Ann Montzka-Smelser** – Benefits of Attending Institutes – Amazing things happen when students attend institutes. Children learn from other children. They are inspired by other children’s struggles and successes. They make friends from other countries and from around this country. There is magic in hearing the same thing from another teacher. Student’s progress at institutes is amazing. Parents take copious notes and connect to other parents. Institutes benefit everyone.

3/9/15 – **Robert Richardson** – Ideas for Creative Review – See 2012 Parents as Partners (2/17/12)

3/16/15 – **Jenny Barrett** – Battling Perfectionism and Creating a Growth Mindset – To battle perfectionism, a child needs to practice “self compassion.” Perfectionism is a self-destructive and addictive belief system which says, “If I look perfect, and do everything perfect, I can avoid shame and judgment and blame.” Perfectionism is not self-improvement, but is trying to earn the approval of others. It is unattainable. Any slight error is failure. It is a “fixed mindset.” However, in a “growth mindset,” a child learns that he has the ability and capacity to learn and grow. Children are praised for their efforts, not their results. “Easy” is a waste of time. Children don’t compare themselves to others, just learn from others. Parents should give feedback on specific things like “a bent thumb” not whether a performance was good or bad. Was a shift in tune or out of tune?” The student becomes part of the teaching process. The teacher observes everything, ignores most things, and works on 1 thing. Books that are recommended: Helping Parents to Practice by Ed Sprunger; Daring Greatly by Brene Brown; Mindset by Carol Deweck; Intelligent Music Teaching by Robert Duke; The differences between Winning and Succeeding by John Wooden.

3/23/15 – **Glenda Thurer** – Sustaining Productive Playful, Powerful Practice – When Glenda Thurer taught her own daughter, she had a straight line Parent-Child relationship. She used a puppet to be the “teacher” in the relationship. It was easier for her daughter to take corrections from a puppet instead of the mother. Puppets can change the rules without losing credibility. They can ask for the child to practice tasks just in reach of the child’s skill level. Other props that work are animal erasers that can ask questions. Puppets without ears can ask a child if he heard the note in tune since he (the puppet) couldn’t hear without ears. Puppets can ask “were both notes of the slur the same length?” Other

helpful, non-judgmental activities: 1. Standing on a trampoline to help with balance; 2. Repetitions by accumulating animals or building a tower; 3. Distract game where the parent tries to distract a child and the child tries very hard to concentrate; 4. Putting together a puzzle, piece by piece as a task is accomplished; 5. Fish for fish with written directions on the back; 6. Games that the child designs; 7. Stickers, penny calendars, investment bank account (1 penny for each minute practiced). In the investment bank, the teacher pays the children for practice, but they can only withdraw money at the end of the year. The students who practice the best sound the best.

3/23 15 – **Melissa Fees** – Never Hurry, Never Stop – Melissa Fees is a parent with children in Valley of the Sun Suzuki Association or VSSA in the Phoenix, AZ area. She is a child psychologist and a mother of 5 Suzuki kids. She has tips for working parents. She recommends writings by Jeanine Ludke on Suzuki Parent Classes; by Ed Kreitman on “Defining Progress: Why Are We Doing This” (see Parents as Partners 2013 at www.azsuzuki.org.); by Daniel Coyle on The Talent Code; and by Carol Dweck on Mindset. The Suzuki lifestyle means listening, reviewing, group classes. The daily toil can’t be rushed. There is no short cut toward art, beauty, love. Listening helps in the learning of pieces. It sets the tone of the house. She makes a Playlist of everyone’s working piece that is repeated at least ten times every day. Review polishes the technique and allows children to play with abandon and focus on one teaching point. Group Classes give the children joy and friendships. We are social beings and need to see our place in the bigger community. The important thing is not which piece the child is “on” but the journey of becoming an artist. Reward the effort and work of the child as the journey continues. There is a sign available with this quote at www.neverhurryneverstop.com.

3/23/15 - **Marilyn Kessler** -The Value of Group Lessons

Marilyn Kessler hosted a discussion with a panel of Suzuki parents, on the topic of the value of group lessons. These technical and musical benefits were mentioned:

- 1) Playing review pieces, which are performed differently and with more maturity and skill as technique expands and evolves.
- 2) Building the ability to focus in an ensemble setting, which helps when students are ready to join orchestras and chamber groups.
- 3) Offering a chance to take some musical risks, as younger students may attempt new things in group that they observe from their more advanced peers.

The social benefits of group dominated the bulk of the conversation. We get the impression that the parents could speak for hours on the following social behaviors they’ve witnessed:

- 1) The motivating “continuum” of students in group, from the younger students who are motivated by older peers playing pieces that they long to play, and the older students who are motivated to be role models for the younger ones.
- 2) Naturally introverted children gain confidence by becoming leaders in their classes and chamber groups.
- 3) Students develop understanding of what being part of a positive and supportive community looks/feels like through their years in group.
- 4) Strong bonds between the teens that have grown up together, and how they look forward to coming to group so they can all hang out together.

In conclusion, group lessons provide technical, musical, and social benefits to the participating students and parents. (by Megyn Neff)

3/30/15 - **Holly Blackwelder Carpenter** - Can Every Parent?

Ms. Blackwelder Carpenter hits the nail on the head when she states that the main difference between Suzuki education presently and when it was first brought to America, is that our family dynamic as a society has changed dramatically. It is no longer the norm for one parent to stay at home all day. The more likely scenario is that parents and children are away from home, and each other, for 10-12 hours per day. After describing a typical packed family schedule, she states the effectiveness of a Suzuki education is not a question of desire or ability, but time. She then poses the question, "We know that every child can, but, can every parent?" Here are some of her tips for the 21st century Suzuki parent who aims for seven days of practice:

- 1) Try to schedule all music lessons on the same day (for multiple kids in lessons).
- 2) Find a way to practice on the go. Do bow holds in the car, have your child do their review during dinner.
- 3) Talk to your teacher about what, if anything, your child can practice independently. For example, independent review might be a possibility even for half the week.
- 4) Employ an older Suzuki student in the studio to be a "practice sitter" once a week (or more).
- 5) Set a timer for when to start practice. If you say you'll practice after the house is clean, then sometimes practice might not happen.
- 6) Work efficiently. Talk to your teacher about which families practice most efficiently, and ask those parents how they practice.

The most important question to ask yourself, as a parent trying to prioritize lessons amongst everything else that needs to get done, is: "Are music lessons optional in our family?" If the answer is yes, then you'll have a rough go at trying to make it work. If the answer is no, then the practices *will* happen. It's not a bad idea to ask yourself on a daily basis, "Why am I practicing with my child today?" That will help get priorities straight. Ms. Blackwelder Carpenter also asks to consider these points:

- 1) How long should the music education go on for? 1 year? 5 years? Until 8th grade? 12th grade? At some point, music lessons will no longer be an option for the student, so decide at what point it becomes their decision to continue, and not just your own.
 - 2) Arguments during practices are not actually about the violin. Practicing is sometimes the only one-on-one time you'll get with your child. It is where the pushing of boundaries will be experimented. Be prepared for that, and heed this advice...
 - 3) Think of your child as a teenager. Think about what kind of a person they will be as a teen, what they will have learned from these practices with you.
 - 4) Focus on the positives.
 - 5) See practice time as a blessing of being able to spend time with your child.
 - 6) They will likely remember, as a teen or an adult, the good practices--not the bad ones.
- (by Megyn Neff)