

AN ANALYSIS OF THE SUZUKI METHOD AS IT PERTAINS TO THE
IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING MUSIC USING THE NATIVE LANGUAGE
APPROACH; THE COMPARISON OF THE SUZUKI METHOD TO TRADITIONAL
METHODS; AND HOW THE NATIVE LANGUAGE APPROACH AIDS IN
TEACHING MUSIC TO STUDENTS WITH DYSLEXIA

by

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ABSTRACT

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The Suzuki Method, also known as the Mother Tongue Method or Talent Education, is a method of teaching music to children using a similar process to that of native language acquisition. The method uses musical immersion, heavy parental involvement, learning by ear, and abundant repetition of repertoire to learn the language of music. The purpose of this manuscript is to show the benefits of the Suzuki Method from a historical, developmental, pedagogical perspective as well as how the method can benefit students with disabilities. This thesis organizes the exploration of the Suzuki Method into five chapters. The first chapter discusses a brief history of music education as well as how Dr. Suzuki's educational philosophy compared to other influential educators such as Pestalozzi, Montessori, and Mason. Chapter two examines current research that supports Suzuki's philosophy as well as the Suzuki Method. Chapter three

compares and contrasts the Suzuki Method and the traditional instrumental music classroom. Chapter four discusses how the implementation of the Suzuki Method can benefit students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia. The final chapter provides discussion on the previous chapter with implications for the instrumental music classroom and music education.

Keywords: Mother Tongue Method, Talent Education, Native Language Acquisition, Musical language acquisition, Dyslexia, Suzuki Method.

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DEDICATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
DEDICATION	v
CHAPTER ONE: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.....	1
Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827)	2
Lowell Mason (1792-1872).....	5
Maria Montessori (1870-1952)	6
Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998)	8
Comparison of Pestalozzi, Mason, Montessori, and Suzuki	9
CHAPTER TWO: DEVLEOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE	13
The Mother Tongue Approach	13
Transition from Learning by Ear to Reading.....	16
The Role of the Parent in the Suzuki Method	19
Building Good Character Through Music	20
Conclusion	21
CHAPTER THREE: CURRENT PEDAGOGIES	23
The Suzuki Method- The Mother Tongue Method	23
Philosophy- Mother Tongue Method: An Aural Approach	24
The Suzuki Triangle	30
The Teacher Training Process	32
Explanation of the Suzuki Books	35
The Pre-Twinkle Stage	36

Book 1	38
Suzuki Instruction in Practice	39
Traditional Instrumental Pedagogy	44
The Traditional Lesson in Practice	44
Traditional Instrumental Pedagogy	46
Comparing the Suzuki and Traditional Pedagogies	46
The Learning Process	46
Contest and Competition in the United States	52
Note Reading	53
CHAPTER FOUR: MUSIC AND DYSLEXIA	57
Dyslexia	57
The Mother Tongue Approach and Students with Dyslexia	59
Music Intervention to Assist with Language-Based Learning Disabilities	60
Implications in the Suzuki Classroom	61
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	69
Obstacles for Suzuki in the Schools Implementation	71
Conclusion	73
REFERENCES	76

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of music education is both long and rich. Some of the earliest documentations of music education go back as far as ancient Greece around 2500 years ago in the writings of Plato and Aristotle. Music, as an art form, was primarily an oral tradition and had no formal musical notation until it was developed in the 9th century when the church saw the need to standardize chants used in religious services. Once a standardized method for notating western music had been created, music education began transforming in its approach and training of musicians.

In Italy, as early as 1535, orphanages, or conservatorios, were the first schools that placed a heavy emphasis on musical training. Abeles, Hoffer, & Klotman (1995) believe “that orphans were selected to be trained as performers because they had no families; a life ‘on the road,’ which was typical for musicians of that period, caused them little concern” (pp. 6-7). Now conservatories are understood to be a college for the study of music and are revered for their high level of musicianship training. The first conservatory in Europe, outside of the Italian orphanages, was the Paris Conservatory formed in 1784. This started the trend of conservatories being built around Europe and the United States where musicians could further study and hone their musical craft. In the United States, singing-schools were recorded as the first musical education provided to the public. “Exact data regarding the formation of singing-schools are scanty and meager. But with the growing sentiment in favor of singing ‘by rule and art,’ it is probable that they were started in the churches which successively introduced the new kind of singing” (Birge, 1988, p. 9).

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827)

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi is one of the people credited for creating the idea of public education for all. Some would even consider him the father of modern education (Gabhart, 1944). Pestalozzi was born in Zurich, Switzerland and was raised solely by his mother and a loyal servant after the death of his father when he was very young (Bowers & Gehring, 2004). Being raised by these two women was extremely influential in Pestalozzi's life and work. For instance, Pestalozzi "recognized the importance of a close relationship between the home and education in the school to help ensure the child's success. His writing continually emphasized the importance of the mother in a child's life and the impact the mother child relationship had on the child's development" (Bowers & Gehring, 2004, p. 308). Pestalozzi also suffered from a lack of strong social skills as a child. As a result, Pestalozzi felt strongly that social skills should be taught to children as part of their education. From the years 1775 to 1804, there were many unsuccessful attempts by Pestalozzi to open and run schools that matched his vision for education. It was in 1805 in Yverdon, Switzerland that Pestalozzi was finally able to bring his dreams to fruition, not only educating those less fortunate, but providing a place to hold teacher preparation trainings. This was the first instance in history that teachers were provided with pedagogical training and has since developed into the certification process for teachers that is used today.

Pestalozzi's teaching philosophy was completely child centered. He relied on children to learn from each other and believed that children should not exclusively learn the material that they were presented by the teacher, but be taught how to be life-long learners. "Children instructed children; they themselves tried the experiment; all I did

was to suggest it. Here again I obeyed necessity. Not having a single assistant, I had the idea of putting one of the most advanced pupils between two others who were less advanced” (Pestalozzi, in Compayre, 1907, p. 424). Pestalozzi’s philosophy for education can be summed up in the 11 Major Components that Monroe (1912) lists below:

1. Emphasis on observation or sense of perception (intuition).
2. Language always being rooted in observation of an object.
3. Judgment or criticism being inappropriate when students are learning.
4. Teaching should begin with the simplest elements and proceed gradually according to the development of the child ... in psychologically connected order.
5. Enough time should be directed to the lesson to allow mastery.
6. Teaching is not an exercise in dogmatism, but in development.
7. Teachers must respect students.
8. The chief end of elementary teaching is not to impart knowledge and talent to the learner, but to develop and increase the powers of his intelligence.
9. Knowledge and power are related, skill results from learning information.
10. Love should regulate the relation between teacher and student, especially as to discipline.
11. The higher aims of education should regulate instruction. (p. 318)

George Nageli was the first to compile Pestalozzian ideas on education and transfer them to music education in his 1810 book *The Theory of Instruction in Singing*. “It was a treatise that opened a new music instruction to children” (Abeles, Hoffer, & Klotman, 1995, p. 10). This is the same book that was used as the “foundation for vocal

music instruction offered by Lowell Mason at the Boston Academy of Music later in the nineteenth century” (p. 10). Music education in the United States was heavily influenced by Pestalozzian ideas. This is evident in Boston where dialogue began taking place to add music education into the curriculum of the Boston Public Schools. In 1830, Naef, a student turned teacher of Pestalozzi, presented the Principles of the Pestalozzian System of Music at the American Instruction Institute meeting.

1. To teach sounds before signs and to make the child learn to sing before he learns the written notes or their names;
2. To lead him to observe by hearing and imitating sounds, their resemblances and differences, their agreeable and disagreeable effect, instead of explaining these things to him - in a word, to make active instead of passive in learning;
3. To teach but one thing at a time – rhythm, melody, and expression, which are to be taught and practiced separately before the child is called to the difficult task of attending all at once;
4. To make him practice each step of these divisions, until he is a master of it, before passing to the next;
5. To give the principles and theory after the practice, and as induction from it;
6. To analyze and practice the elements of articulate sound in order to apply them to music, and
7. To have the names of the notes correspond to those used in instrumental music. (Abeles, Hoffer, & Klotman, 1995, p. 11)

Lowell Mason (1792-1872)

Heavily influenced, as previously mentioned, by Pestalozzi's education philosophy, Lowell Mason was responsible for bringing many of these same ideals to music education in the United States. This is shown in Scanlon's (1942) claim that Mason "developed the theories of Pestalozzi as applied to the teaching of music to a much greater extent than did Pestalozzi himself" (p. 25).

During the early 19th century Mason was a participant in singing-schools, a religiously based music education method intended to teach church congregants how to read and sing written religious music. It was participating in singing-schools that helped shape Mason's philosophy of music education: that all children could learn to sing. At this time, the ability to pursue a career in music was uncommon. Directors of singing-schools and church choirs were often volunteers or paid very little. To make a career out of music, one would have to work for a great many churches and singing-schools. Lowell Mason, defying the odds, was able to build this career for himself and made it his mission to accomplish two things: "to raise the standard of singing-school teaching, which he regarded as the foundation of popular music education, and to improve the quality of church music material and of choir singing" (Birge, 1988, p. 25).

Mason's success in directing church choirs and singing-schools led him to become involved in the evolving discussions that every child could learn music if properly taught and therefore music education should become part of the public school curriculum. Mason believed that teachers, especially those who worked with younger students, should receive higher level training in order to be more effective teachers. Mason, along with many other singing school instructors began hosting singing school

conventions that included high levels of choral performance as well as providing pedagogical training to teachers in the area. These conventions led to the creation of the Boston Music Academy, whose sole purpose was to provide training to teachers, and the 1834 publication of the *Manual of Instruction*. This book printed the same Pestalozzian Principles for Music Education that Naef had brought to the American Instruction Institute meeting in 1830 and popularized the practice of using Pestalozzian Principles in music education. After many years of meetings and discussions regarding the merit of adding music education into public education curriculum, Lowell Mason offered his teaching services, free of charge, for one year to teach at the Hawes Grammar School to demonstrate to the Boston School Committee that all children could learn music if properly taught (Pemberton, 1992). The experiment proved successful and music education was integrated into the education curriculum in the Boston public schools. Mason believed that music had the power “to shape character and enrich the lives of every person” (Pemberton, 1992, p. 52). Music was not simply an extracurricular activity, but “a vital part of human life” (p. 52), and as a result must be taken just as seriously as the subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic.

Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

From the time of childhood, Maria Montessori took education extremely seriously. In a time where women did not receive higher-level education or build careers, she ignored the social pressure and continued in education. At age 13 she entered into an all-boys school to study engineering. However, she quickly decided to leave engineering in pursuit of a career in medicine. Montessori applied to medical school and was initially rejected, but she refused to take no for an answer. She continued to take courses and

reapply for a place in the medical program until she was finally accepted. Montessori was the first woman in Italy to graduate from medical school in 1896 and afterward became interested in the education of children who suffered from physical or intellectual disabilities. In 1900 she accepted a position as co-director for a school responsible for training special education teachers and learning best practices for special education students. From this training institute, Montessori went on to open her own school for early childhood students in an impoverished area of Rome in 1907. This was the first school of its kind in Italy.

Maria Montessori's teaching philosophy was based upon the belief that given the right tools, students would take responsibility for their own learning. Part of the tools that Montessori created were child sized furniture and manipulatives. Rather than trying to learn how to find their place in an adult's world, children were given a space in a world completely designed for children. Montessori believed that children learn experientially and therefore should learn by doing using repetitious practice of the desired skills "to make an experience their own" (Mooney, 2000, p. 29). In other words, Montessori believed at working at the individual child's pace and learning a concept in their own time based on repetition and mastery, not on a timeline. She also believed that it is the teacher's responsibility to increase each child's competence whenever possible and allow the child large blocks of uninterrupted time to play (Mooney, 2000). Further, part of Montessori's legacy is observation. Today Montessori teachers are trained to "teach little and observe much" (p. 31).

Shinichi Suzuki (1898-1998)

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki was of the belief that the purpose of music education was to “develop noble human beings in order to make the world more peaceful and loving” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 142). He is often quoted as saying phrases such as “tone has a living soul,” “tone is the living soul,” and “beautiful tone, beautiful heart” (Hendricks, 2011, p. 143). The Suzuki Method, also referred to as the Mother-Tongue Method or Talent Education, was built on the belief that every child can learn to play music and that the world would become a better place for it (Suzuki, Selden, & Selden, 1983).

Dr. Suzuki was a self-taught violinist, beginning to play the violin at age 16 with only the model of recordings to help guide him in his playing. These life experiences helped to develop Suzuki’s idea that learning music was similar to learning a native language and that given the right environment, any child could learn the language. Suzuki lived through the use of the Hydrogen Bomb by U.S. forces on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end of World War II in 1945. As a result, teaching the younger generation to be empathetic and build good and kind character through music education was of utmost importance to Dr. Suzuki. Eubanks (2014) states “Suzuki’s ultimate goal was not to train professional musicians, though his students did often go on to careers in music. Rather, Suzuki’s theory was that the music he taught was simply a medium through which to train reasoning, character, and happiness” (pp. 50-51).

Similar to native language acquisition, immersion in the language of music is necessary in order for children to learn it successfully. According to Suzuki, this immersive experience is not possible for young children without their parents (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981). Suzuki students must be able to hear the language of music in an

immersive environment created by the parent. This teamwork of the parent and child also requires substantial repetition, mimicking the repetition children practice when learning their native language. Suzuki also believed that social interaction was necessary in order to make learning fun and to encourage future learning. As a result, children's group classes became an important part of learning alongside private lessons with the teacher to give more individualized feedback and assignments to students and their parents. Finally, Suzuki believed that note reading should only be learned after the child has a fluent understanding of the language of music, similar to the process in which children learn to read their native language.

Comparison of Pestalozzi, Mason, Montessori, and Suzuki

Although the similarities between all the aforementioned educators are clear, when asked which education philosophies were influential in developing the Suzuki Method, Dr. Suzuki credits Montessori rather than Pestalozzi or Mason (Eubanks, 2014). Eubanks credits this discrepancy with the fact that Pestalozzian philosophies were such a heavy part of Japanese culture that "Suzuki absorbed them without seeing them as external or particularly striking to his own psychology or background" (p. 42). The culture in Japan was such that the mother in the family was an extremely important part of child rearing and learning. As mentioned before, Pestalozzi believed that having a parent (specifically a mother) and teacher work closely together was essential to ensuring the learning of the child. This is evident in Suzuki's belief that parental involvement is essential in the music learning process for young children. Suzuki and Montessori both used instruments and materials sized to fit the child and attempted to create an environment that was child centered rather than trying to make children fit into an adult

environment. Both Suzuki and Montessori based their teaching off of self-driven progress and mastery of every step before moving on to something new. Whether or not Suzuki was familiar with Lowell Mason, many of their ideas were extremely similar. Both music educators believed (a) that music should be taught and learned as an aural tradition before teaching the musical notation, (b) that children should actively participate in their learning, that teachers should teach one musical concept at a time, what Suzuki called the “one point lesson,” (c) to build mastery through repetition, (d) to teach the theory of a musical concept only once the student has mastered the musical concept in his or her singing or playing, (e) and to identify musical sounds and analyze them by ear in order to incorporate those sounds into the child’s own music making. I believe that the biggest difference between the two music educators was the medium they used to teach children these musical ideas: Mason through singing and Suzuki through playing the violin.

After researching other pedagogues in music and education, I discovered that Suzuki’s ideas and philosophy aligned with Pestalozzi, Mason, and Montessori. Therefore, I created Table 1 to demonstrate how all four of these educators and their philosophies are built upon the same principle of experiential learning. Each of the educators believed in students learning in an environment catered to the child and children learning from their environment. This environment could include specifically purposed materials, parental involvement, and learning from other students around them. All four educators also believed in the intentional repetitive practice of desired skills in order to promote mastery, as well as making learning child-centered rather than teacher-centered.

Table 1

Table comparing Pestalozzi, Mason, Montessori, and Suzuki philosophies

	Pestalozzi	Mason	Montessori	Suzuki
All children can learn	x	x	x	x
Parental involvement is crucial	x			x
Experiential learning	x	x	x	x
Materials sized to the student			x	x
Education crucial to future success	x		x	
Music education will help mankind		x		x
Repetition of skills	x	x	x	x
Mastery based learning	x	x	x	x
Children learning from each other	x	x	x	x
Child centered learning	x	x	x	x
Sound before sight	x	x		x

The Suzuki Method is an instrumental teaching philosophy that falls in line with the ideas of some of the educators most influential in helping to shape education, as we know it today (Suzuki Association of the Americas, 2021). In the following chapters, I will address and clarify the philosophy of the Suzuki Method as it relates to child development, current teaching pedagogies, and working with children with learning disabilities.

CHAPTER 2

DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

In the previous chapter, the teaching philosophies of Pestalozzi, Mason, Montessori and Suzuki were compared and contrasted. Despite being from different countries, time periods, and backgrounds in life, all four educators had extremely similar philosophies. All of these philosophies were developed without using traditional research methods and grew out observation and creative instruction. The purpose of this chapter is to use current research that supports Suzuki's ideas and his like-minded educators held to present a case for the continued use of the Suzuki Method in education.

The Mother Tongue Approach

Suzuki's Mother Tongue approach is built on the belief that the environment shapes the child. As a result, it is imperative to build an environment that will foster desired learning. In the case of the Suzuki Method, the desired learning is the language of music. When discussing language acquisition, there are several theories on how infants develop the ability to speak their mother tongue. One theory is that children are natural geniuses at "drawing wide-ranging grammatical inferences from random bits of language" heard during the first few years of life (Halpern, 2016, p. 1174). Another is that children are born with something called Universal Grammar: the belief that there is a function in the brain that allows children to understand all human language grammars from birth (Chomsky, 2000). This ability then sheds the unused grammars from the brain. However, there has been no success in trying to find this Universal Grammar function in the brain. Halpern (2016) believes that there is another possibility for language acquisition in children: that "the mind of the infant...is so plastic, so malleable...that it

does not acquire, but is formed by, the language it hears” (p. 1175). In other words, that there is not a certain region of the brain that simply holds all of the potential language at birth, but rather children’s brains are shaped by the language environment around them. This theory matches Suzuki’s beliefs that musical ability develops from birth and can continue to be developed throughout their lifetime. Just as Suzuki (1983) recognized that “Japanese children can all speak Japanese” (p. 1), Halpern (2016) argues that “given normal nourishment and activities, the child will grow bigger without design or effort on his part; just so, given even a bare-bones social and linguistic environment, the child will acquire a human language without design or effort on his part” (p. 1177).

It could be argued that learning a language and learning music are not the same thing, but Gordon (2004), a music education researcher, supports Suzuki’s claim, stating “even though music is a literature and not a grammatical language, the way accomplished musicians learn music follows much the same process as learning language” (p. 7). When learning their native language, children build the language in the following stages: listening, speaking, thinking, reading, and writing (Gordon, 2004). The Suzuki method is built upon this exact same progression when learning the language of music.

Gordon compares each stage of language acquisition to learning music as a language, or what I like to call musical language acquisition. In both language and musical language acquisition, listening is the first step. “Without a listening vocabulary, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to acquire the remaining four vocabularies satisfactorily” (Gordon, 2004, p. 7). Gordon (2004) also reiterates that babies listen for around a year before they begin to learn to speak. In the Suzuki Method, listening is one of the most important aspects to musical language acquisition as children learn to play the

instrument by ear. Suzuki is credited with saying “ five hours of listening a day is a good start” (C. Krigbaum, personal communication, 2019). After listening, children then begin to speak “by imitating words they have heard. Generally, the more words they have heard and are hearing, the wider their speaking vocabulary” (Gordon, 2004, p. 7). In musical language acquisition, this would be the singing stage: students would be able to sing songs or pieces that they have heard before as part of their listening vocabulary. Singing is also an important step in the Suzuki Method. O’Neill, a Suzuki Association of the Americas teacher trainer, integrates singing into every activity possible with beginning cello students (A.A. O’Neill, personal communication, July, 2018). Students sing common folk song such as *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* and *Row, Row, Row Your Boat* as well as matching pitch and singing up the D Major Scale when learning the parts of the instrument. All of these singing exercises are essential to developing a good “thinking vocabulary” (Gordon, 2004). The thinking vocabulary develops alongside the speaking vocabulary. It is in this stage that “the child learns to rearrange familiar words in an unfamiliar order to ask and answer questions” (Gordon, 2004, p. 7). In the Suzuki Method, this stage would be the same as matching pitch on the instrument and beginning to perform note discovery using familiar songs and pieces from the listening and singing stages. R. Freitag (personal communication, July, 2015) says that if students are playing or singing something in the Suzuki repertoire incorrectly, then “they aren’t doing enough listening.” Gordon believed that listening, speaking, and thinking are built upon each other in a cyclical rather than linear fashion. “Just as the more children learn to listen, the better they learn to speak (and vice versa), so too, the more children think, the better they learn to listen and speak (and vice versa)” (Gordon, 2004, p. 7).

Transition from Learning by Ear to Reading

I believe there is a difference between learning by rote and learning by ear. I consider learning an instrument by rote to be teachers showing students how to play pieces, without students having developed their different music language acquisition vocabularies as describes by Gordon (2004). Students are able to play pieces simply by knowing where to place their fingers, but do not necessarily know the pitches or rhythms they are playing or how to continue building their repertoire without assistance from a teacher. Learning by ear requires students to be fluent in the music language acquisition vocabularies of listening and singing before beginning the playing vocabulary so that they understand both how the instrument functions as well as how certain pitches and rhythms should be played on their instruments. In my experience learning by ear, rather than by rote, allows students the ability to continually build their repertoire and learn pieces at their own pace without required teacher assistance.

When learning their native language, children perform the process of thinking, speaking, and thinking for years before formally learning how to read. Even early readers do not learn to read before age four, and the average child begins learning how to read at age five when they enter Kindergarten (Gordon, 1997). This means that children are informally learning and building upon the cycle of listening, speaking, and thinking for three to four years before being formally introduced to reading. Suzuki was extremely intuitive in the development of his method when delaying reading for his students until they had successfully built a strong foundation upon the cycle of listening, singing, and playing the instrument.

This idea of delaying note reading is extremely controversial. In traditional instrumental teaching, students are taught how to read music from the first lesson with the idea that the earlier students learn to read music, the better. Gordon (2004) argues that teaching note reading from the beginning has no basis in developmental learning. Teaching students to read and write music is “out of sequence whenever the three basic vocabularies [listening, speaking, thinking] have not been developed to serve as readiness” (p. 8). If students are taught to read without first having the three basic vocabularies, then it is similar to getting a child to read a word that the child has never heard before using only the letters in the alphabet - it would be a nonsense word to the child. “Children learn to listen to, speak, think about, read and write *words* – and not letters of the alphabet. Individual letters may assist children in learning how to spell and in using a source organizing alphabetically, but it is words that will guide their understanding of the world around them” (Gordon, 2004, p. 8). To teach children music by teaching what each individual pitch looks like on the staff, teaches them how to read but not the context. He goes on further stating that teaching children to read without the foundation of listening, speaking, and thinking “is akin to hearing a word but not grasping the meaning of the overall thought of which it is a part. For musical patterns to have merit in the instructional process, tonality and/or meter must be established, preferably by having one or more songs and/or chants performed as an introduction to those patterns” (Gordon, 2004, p. 9).

Eberbach & Crowley (2009) find that children who lack “specialized knowledge and practice” (p. 39) were unable to participate in learning in a meaningful way. “The degree to which children notice surface or deep features is related to the extent of their

associated knowledge” (p. 48). In terms of musical language acquisition, this means students might be able to read individual notes and rhythms if taught to read music from the onset of their music education, but without the context of a wide listening, singing, and playing vocabulary, the recognition will only be surface level. There will be little to no recognition of musical patterns and phrases because the child has not yet learned any musical patterns and has no experience with musical phrasing. Gordon (2004) states that “simultaneously teaching the reading and writing of patterns raises difficulties since they involve different processes” (p. 12). As it applies to music, symbols only represent what is already within the child’s knowledge. Gordon summarizes the natural learning process as it applies to music language acquisition:

A quick review of the music development sequence in order:
students listen to songs and hear patterns in context and then learn to sing and chant patterns they have heard using neutral syllables. Next they perform through imitation the sound of those patterns using syllables. Then they audiate, create, and improvise their own patterns. Following the model of performing those same patterns they have heard and then associating syllables with those patterns, students learn to read by associating syllables with already-learned patterns in music notation. There is no immediate need to teach letter and time-value names or music theory. Remember, grammar and parsing sentences (language theory) is taught only after students can listen to, communicate, read, and write their spoken language. (Gordon, 2004, p. 12)

The Role of the Parent in the Suzuki Method

If the assumption that music language acquisition can be developed similarly to native language acquisition, then the role of the parent in musical language acquisition should be just as vital as in native language acquisition. When children begin their native language acquisition process, they are constantly listening to and absorbing the environment around them. Parents are their first teachers constantly talking to them encouraging vocalizations that the child makes that later develop into speech. “Just as children do not need a speaking teacher, so, too, they should not need a singing teacher” (Gordon, 2004, p. 8). If children are provided an environment by their parent that is musically rich and full of singing and listening to high-level music, then they will naturally develop the ability to sing and understand music as a native language.

Suzuki believed that a child will develop “exactly in the way he is taught” by the parent (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, p. 24). Two of Suzuki’s conditions for developing great musical ability were beginning as early as possible, and creating the best possible environment. Both of these conditions rely on the parent to begin the musical language acquisition process as early as possible. Suzuki saw parents as the cultivators for their children’s future success. “They are the ones responsible for raising their children with love” (p. 77). If a child is “deprived of adequate listening environments, children will encounter difficulties in expressing themselves in speech” (Gordon, 2004, p. 7). The true is same for music. If a child is deprived an adequate listening environment, they will have difficulty expressing themselves through music. That being said, it is never too late to begin the language acquisition process, only that starting the musical acquisition process later in life will require “much more training than a small child does to reach the same

level of ability” (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, pp. 55-56). This relates back to Halpern’s (2016) belief that infant’s brains are shaped by language and the environments around them. It is a much easier process to shape an undeveloped and plastic brain than it is to retrain a brain after it is already developed, but not impossible. Suzuki (1981) recommends that to shape an infant’s brain for musical ability, “play the most beautiful music on records from the day of birth” (p. 55). Suzuki believed that parents had the most responsibility in the development of the child going as far as to say “the fate of the child is in the hands of the parent” (p. 56).

Building Good Character Through Music

Suzuki (1981) believed that through learning the language of music, children could build the most important skill: good character. He stated, “from much experience, I can clearly state that truly great talent customarily accompanies a beautiful and deep heart” (p. 60). Suzuki believed that building good character in children was important above all else and decided the medium of music was the best method to build good character traits such as empathy, cooperation, helping, sharing, and generosity. Kalliopuska & Ruokonen (1993) found that music had the capability to increase empathy and prosociability in their study testing a music-based empathy education program. Students who went through their music education program increased significantly in areas of empathy and prosocial behaviors, such as generosity, cooperation, helping, and sharing (Brief & Motowidlo, 1986), from the pretest to posttest compared to the control group of children that did not. This research reaffirms what Suzuki found through observation; that the study of music has the ability to build desirable character traits for children.

In the Suzuki community, teachers and parents often attest that Suzuki students learn so much emotional regulation ability through learning how to play music. Saarikallio (2011) found this not only to be true, but that the skills built through “music-related emotional self-regulation” in childhood remained “highly similar throughout adulthood” (p. 307). This is completely in line with Suzuki’s philosophy of creating a generation of people with good character through music. “If, as a person works at playing the violin well, he develops the talent to overcome any difficult problem by working, then the talent will be born to accomplish even the hardest problems easily. As a person practices the violin, he creates this talent. Music exists for the purpose of growing an admirable heart” (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, p. 62).

Conclusion

Similar to Montessori, the Suzuki Method developed through observation of young children and his intuition of how children learn, which helped to shape education to what it is today. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2020) child-centered learning and teaching is considered a best practice as more research continues to support these teaching strategies. Suzuki’s principles of the Mother Tongue approach to music language acquisition, delayed note reading, the necessity for parental involvement in music language acquisition, and building good character through music are all supported by current research. Through my observations the traditional instrumental music classroom has changed very little in its approach to teaching children despite widely accepted research concluding that child-centered learning is the best approach to teaching regardless of the content of the curriculum. As Schachter (2017) found, even when teachers know how children learn, they don’t always

teach using that knowledge. Suzuki ideas continue to be relevant today as current research supports his ideas and philosophy into best teaching and learning practices.

CHAPTER 3

CURRENT PEDAGOGIES

The Suzuki Method- The Mother Tongue Method

The Suzuki Method is based around the teaching philosophy of Dr. Shinichi Suzuki: using the “Mother Tongue” approach as it applies to the language of music. Suzuki believed that musical ability was not “inherited or inborn, but learned and trained” (Suzuki, Selden, & Selden, 1983, p. 20). Dr. Suzuki held the belief that every child could learn the language of music based on the realization that “Japanese children can all speak Japanese”(p. 1)! None of these children needed a formal education to learn how to speak Japanese, because they learned from the environment around them. Dr. Suzuki realized that this could also be true for music, if the child was given the right environment to flourish. He believed that all children could learn the language of music because man was the product of his environment (Suzuki, Selden, & Selden, 1983). If given the right musical environment, any child could learn how to play music. With this realization, Suzuki thought that talent could be developed rather than the common idea that talent was innate. Up until this point, and even today, you will often hear people talk about talented children and prodigies as if they were simply born that way (Ruthsatz & Detterman, 2003; The Times (London), 2013). A prime example of this is Mozart. Many times people will describe Mozart as a child prodigy, simply born with talent. But this belief completely ignores the fact that Mozart’s father was himself a musician and raised his son in the environment of music that created this great talent. “Do not call them geniuses. Any child can do the same if he is taught according to the principles of talent

education” (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, p. 28). In his book, *Ability Development from Age Zero*, Suzuki explains:

since I often assert that *talent is not inborn and every child develops*. Many people misunderstand me and ask is there not superior or inferior inborn talent. I have never said that the inborn ability of children is the same. There are no two people exactly alike. However, superior or inferior ability at birth cannot be judged from the eventual results (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, p. 43).

This belief in talent education was completely dependent on the environment of the child. In order for a child to be able to learn the language of music as a native language, the environment would need to center around music from as young of an age as possible. Suzuki called this *Ability Development from Age Zero*. Within this paper, the Suzuki Method, the Mother Tongue Method, and Talent Education will all be used interchangeably as they are all different phrases to describe the same process: learning music from a purposely designed musical environment around them. The musical environment is the most important factor of the Suzuki Method because “people are what they are as a result of their own specific environments” (Suzuki, Selden, & Selden, 1983, p. 10).

Philosophy- Mother Tongue Method: An Aural Approach

When children are going through the process of learning their native language, they begin in the womb and as babies by listening and soaking up the words being spoken around them. They are not able to speak immediately upon entering the world as a newborn. To expect speech from a newborn seems preposterous, so why then would we expect a child to be know and understand music from the moment they are exposed to it?

The Suzuki Method begins with listening, both actively and passively, as a cornerstone for Talent Education. According to teachers who studied with him (H. Brunner, personal communication, 2005), Suzuki believed that no less than five hours a day of passive listening was necessary for the child to be immersed into music at a level that could produce the fluency of a native language. That is, having recordings of music on in the background for five hours a day.

In the Suzuki Method, students are expected to participate in two types of listening: active and passive listening. Both of these listening types take place using the Suzuki recording that accompanies their Suzuki book. For instance, children who are currently in Book 1 will be performing their active and passive listening using their Book 1 recording that includes all of the repertoire in Book 1 recorded by extremely high level, professional musicians. Active listening involves the child actively participating in the listening that is being performed, usually on the piece that the child is currently preparing to learn. Some beneficial active listening activities include keeping a steady beat with the music being listened to, clapping the rhythm of the pieces being listened to, singing along with the pieces being listened to, and dancing to the music being listened to. Active listening requires heavy repetition so that the child can begin to audiate (hear music in their head) before attempting to learn the piece on an instrument. Although no child is exactly the same in their listening needs, the rule I always tell my students is to actively listen to the piece they are trying to learn 10 or more times each day.

Passive listening is simply put, immersion. The Suzuki CD, along with other repertoire of the parents, students, and teachers choice played on their instrument, is played in the background almost constantly in order to create an environment ideal for

developing children's musical ability. Suzuki stated "for musical ability, play the most beautiful music on records from the day of birth" (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, p. 55). This follows the findings of research that show the increased vocabulary of children who are around adults who speak to their children with high frequency as compared to those children who are rarely spoken to and spoken to using a low vocabulary (Weisleder & Fernald, 2014).

Following the listening stage of language acquisition is vocalization: where children begin to try speaking the language that they hear at home. With babies this is often referred to as babbling. Within the context of music, this is trying to replicate sounds heard in music. Gordon (1997) refers to this process as "music babble" (p. 5). This could be matching pitch either by singing or playing an instrument or trying to figure out how to sing or play the music that they know. For Suzuki students, this would mean trying to figure out the pieces that they have been immersed in, listening to for hours and hours each day before they ever picked up an instrument. Once Suzuki students are able to sing a piece that they have heard on their CD using a neutral syllable or humming, they are able to begin note discovery and figure out how to play the piece all by themselves.

Table 2

Table comparing the steps of Native Language Acquisition to Musical Language Acquisition

Native Language Acquisition	Musical Language Acquisition
Step 1: Listening	Step 1: Listening
Step 2: Speaking	Step 2: Singing
Step 3: Thinking	Step 3: Playing
Step 4: Reading	Step 4: Reading
Step 5: Writing	Step 5: Composing

During this stage of language acquisition for music, or as I like to call it musical language acquisition, there are many mistakes made by children as they try and learn how to replicate the correct sound in language or on an instrument. The difference being, when children are first learning their native language, they are in infancy or very early childhood, as seen in Table 2. Rarely would you ever hear a parent scolding their child for not replicating their first sounds with perfect accuracy. Instead, parents are extremely encouraging and repeat the correct sound back to the child until they master the sound they are working on in their native tongue. On the other hand, sometimes in music, parents result to scolding when their child does not master the sound they are attempting within the first couple tries (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981). They have forgotten that their child is learning a new language just as they learned their native language. This is

counterproductive to learning a new language as nobody likes to be scolded or feel unsuccessful at something, no matter what age. Suzuki observed that “children will do what they dislike if they are scolded, however if they do not have the desire to do it, it will not develop into an ability” (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, p. 15). The Suzuki teacher must frequently remind parents of this fact as they are going through the Suzuki journey with the child. Gordon (2004) reaffirms this belief of Suzuki in his assertion that teaching and learning are two different concepts. “Teaching takes place from the ‘outside in’ (teachers teaching students) whereas learning takes place from the ‘inside out’ (students teaching themselves)” (p. 7).

Repetition, as mentioned in the explanation of the listening aspect of Talent Education, is essential to learning any language whether it be the language of music or the child’s native language. “Any skill can be acquired by constant repetition” (Suzuki, Selden, & Selden, 1983, p. 89). Once children have learned the first piece in the Suzuki book, they continue playing this piece on a daily basis. This builds the fluency where they play the piece and continue polishing it incorporating technical and musical aspects to make it an even more beautiful piece of music. This constant repetition builds a repertoire for students that they can both build upon with each new piece of music learned, as well as being able to perform at any time. However, Suzuki warns against repetition with no purpose. “Only bad and ugly things develop from thoughtless repetition”(Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, p. 17). There must always be something that students are continuing to perfect and new ways to play old pieces to keep the joy of the music alive.

Once a child has been fluently speaking the language for several years they begin to learn how to read. A young child might be able to identify the letter Z, but it will remain meaningless until they have spoken fluently and can begin to recognize what kind of sound the letter Z makes and which words might use it. The Suzuki method uses the same process when learning music. First the child must learn how to play music with some fluency before adding the next layer of reading. The child may be able to look at a staff and identify the letter C, but without context of what kind of sound the letter C makes and can recognize the letter C in pieces that they have played, the written note itself has no meaning. “It would be absurd to expect students to approach language reading without extensive experience listening to, speaking, and understanding language. Likewise it would be just as impractical to expect students studying music to understand musical notation without an understanding of musical structures” (Smith, 2006, p. 11).

Gordon (2004) cautions against learning how to read music at the same time as learning how to play music reminding his readers “grammar and parsing sentences (language theory) is taught only after students can listen to, communicate, read, and write their spoken language” (p. 12). When students first begin learning how to read, they do not try to learn how to read at the same level as which they speak. They first learn in easy small sentences far below their speaking ability. The Suzuki Method encourages the same process. There is a wonderful resource that many Suzuki string teachers use called *I Can Read Music* (Martin, 1991). The book separates pitch and rhythm and builds up from only playing two pitches and two rhythms per page to playing all pitches in 1st position (all notes that you can play without having to shift the hand up the neck of the instrument) and all rhythms (quarter notes, half notes, whole notes, eighth notes,

sixteenth notes, dotted half notes, dotted quarter notes, triplets, and finally reading in a 6/8 time signature) by the end of lesson 50. J. Martin (personal communication, December 11, 2020) came up with this process after watching her own four year old daughter struggle with the “intellectual and mathematical approach” (p. 1) being used in a traditionally based note-reading class. Even by the end of the first volume, students are still not reading at the same level at which they are able to play. After completing this book, there are many different resources that Suzuki teachers use, but the teaching content remains the same: combining pitches and rhythms together at a level that is lower than the student’s playing ability. Similar to reading in a native language, only after many years of note reading and even more years of playing the instrument, do the levels of reading and playing become the same. This may seem extreme until you take into consideration that children are learning how to speak for four or five years before they learn how to read (Gordon, 1997). Once they begin learning how to read, they are not expected to switch from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” (Tong, Irby, Lara-Alecio, & Koch, 2014; Chall, 1983; Harlaar, Dale & Plomin, 2007) until age eight or nine, around four years after they first began learning how to read. Suzuki teachers consider this process to be the same when learning the language of music.

The Suzuki Triangle

One cannot discuss the philosophy of the Suzuki method without mentioning the Suzuki Triangle. The Suzuki Triangle is the whole basis of musical progress and describes the balance of responsibility between the parent, child, and teacher during the child’s journey of learning to play an instrument as a native language. Suzuki (1981)

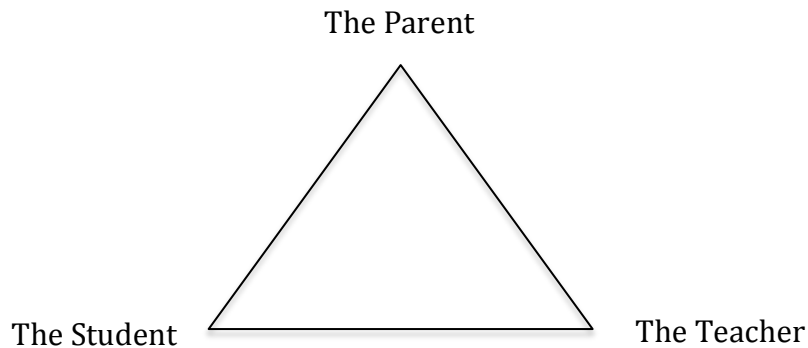
went as far as to say “it is the school teacher who should cooperate with parents in educating the child” (pp. 77-78).

The Suzuki Triangle, as seen in Figure 1, is an equilateral triangle, made up of equal parts of the parent, the child, and the teacher. The role of each of the three corners of the triangle is equally vital to the musical growth and development of the student. The role of the teacher is to give knowledge and expertise of music and the instrument being learned to the student and parent. The teacher gives assignments to help the student improve on the instrument and explain the assignment in such a way that the student and parent understand, in order to be successful in practice at home. The role of the student is to come to lessons willing to listen to the teacher’s expertise and be ready to try their best and learn in lessons. It is also their responsibility to practice to the best of their ability at home with their parent. The parent is equally important to the student and the teacher in the Suzuki lesson. During the weekly lesson, parents are responsible for taking detailed notes during the lesson with the teacher, actively participating in the lesson when asked by the teacher, and asking for clarification of anything they may not have understood during the lesson. This is extremely important because their role does not end at the weekly lesson. Parents are responsible for facilitating daily practice at home with their child and must be comfortable knowing what and how to practice so that they can assist their child in their practice at home. Dr. Suzuki (1981) stated that “the fate of the child is in the hands of the parents” (p. 56) and held the belief that parents were children’s first and most important teacher and for children to truly learn the language of music as a primary language. Therefore, parents must be active participants in their learning. Barret (2007), Journalist for *The Salt Lake Tribune*, interviewed Suzuki parents and found that

they believe “no other method get results from young kids the way Suzuki does” (p. 1) and a large part of that is the parent role in the Suzuki triangle.

Figure 1

The Suzuki Triangle and Its Roles



The Teacher Training Process

Teacher training is one of the ways the Suzuki method stands out from many other instrumental teaching methods. In his book, *Ability Development from Age Zero* (1981), Dr. Suzuki lists the conditions necessary to develop talent and ability.

1. Begin as early as possible.
2. Create the best possible environment.
3. Use the finest teaching method.
4. Provide a great deal of training.
5. Use the finest teachers. (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, p. 23)

In order for one to fully understand the importance of these conditions, I will first begin by talking about the audition process required to be able to take and gain credit for teacher training. To be able to register for teacher training, all interested parties must submit an audition that includes Suzuki repertoire from either Book 4 or the most

advanced book for their instrument. There are two separate auditions that prospective trainees may prepare. The first possible audition is to show that the prospective trainee is at a playing level that would admit training for Books 1-4. If the prospective trainee wishes to go on to complete training for the rest of the Suzuki books, he or she must prepare a more rigorous audition. Suzuki Books 5-10 contain repertoire that is often learned and performed by students at the collegiate level. Because the level of literature is so advanced, it is imperative that the prospective trainee can play the repertoire with fluency. Therefore the audition for the more advanced books is literature from the final books of the Suzuki Violin collection. Anonymous teacher trainers screen these auditions and if the audition is approved, then the interested trainees may take training for credit through Suzuki Association of the Americas. Those prospective trainees who do not pass the audition may still take the teacher training, but will not receive credit through the Suzuki Association of the Americas. Their option is to audit the class and receive all the expertise, but not have the training listed on their Suzuki Association of the Americas teacher profile. The expectation for all Suzuki teachers is that they “enter the Teacher Development Program with well-honed playing skills, thorough musical knowledge and a strong interest in teaching children” (Suzuki Association of the Americas, 2020). This is clearly in line with Dr. Suzuki’s condition of “use the finest teachers” (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, p. 23) to teach children music.

After passing the audition and before teachers can begin Book 1 training, all prospective teachers must take the course Every Child Can, “an introduction to the Suzuki Philosophy and Method” (Suzuki Association of the Americas, 2020). Once this prerequisite has been completed teachers can finally begin the unit training for Book 1,

an intensive eight day course that includes a minimum of 28 hours of lecture, pedagogical demonstration, and guided observations along with “15 additional hours of additional guided observations of student lessons with follow up discussion” (Suzuki Association of the Americas, 2017). In my opinion, the Book 1 training for every instrument is by far the most intensive training out of all the Suzuki Books because it takes Suzuki trainees through the process from starting students and parents with no knowledge of the instrument they are about to learn through playing in three different keys on all four strings (for orchestral string instruments) at the end of Book 1.

Teacher training for Book 1 always begins with learning how to start a brand new student with no former knowledge of the instrument. This stage is called the Pre-Twinkle Stage and can often consume half of the 28 lecture hours that the entire Book 1 course requires teachers to complete for registered training. Before teachers can even begin teaching the repertoire in Book 1, they must first teach the parent and child how to set up the instrument appropriately on the body and teach the skills necessary to be able to play the first piece in Book 1, *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, Variation A*. These skills are all taught in the preliminary stage referred to as the Pre-Twinkle stage in the Suzuki community. This stage can be very open-ended depending on the musical ability already developed from the environment the parent has created at home as well as the motor skills the child has developed. With children who have already developed musical ability and motor skills before beginning lessons, the Pre-Twinkle stage might not take too long as they are refining the skills they already have to fit the instrument they are learning. Children who have developed musical skills, motor skills, or both, very minimally before the start of formal lessons will need much more time in the Pre-Twinkle stage to develop

the ability needed to be able to play the repertoire in Book 1. The Pre-Twinkle stage starts with small learning goals and concepts that are performed with high levels of repetition in order to make the concepts as internalized and fluent as possible.

The rest of the course discusses how to incorporate and teach each new skill required for each piece throughout the rest of Book 1. In order to be successful in these teacher trainings, teachers need to be able to play the book they are receiving instruction in from memory, just as the expectation that the child be able to learn and play these pieces from memory. Using violin Book 1 as an example, participants in Book 1 teacher training must be able to play all 17 pieces, from *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* through *Gavotte* by Gossec, from memory by the end of the 10 day course. The entire process is extremely intensive and often can leave the participants exhausted at the end of the unit training, but brimming with ideas that they are enthusiastic to begin using with their students at home.

Explanation of the Suzuki Books

The Suzuki books are often used for their wonderful collection of literature for young violinists, but it should be emphasized that these are books are exactly that: collections, not method books (R. Frietag, personal communication, July, 2015). Without the proper training for how to use this collection of repertoire, the order of the pieces seems nonsensical. The Suzuki Method was always intended to be an aural method and it taught as an aural method. The books, especially at the beginning stages are for the teacher to visually show parents the skill that the child should be working and to help these parents see the music that their child is playing. Parents are expected to purchase their own copies of the Suzuki books that are brought to lessons each week. At the lesson,

the parent will hand the teacher their Suzuki book so that the teacher can mark in the book any sections that require additional practice. These marked sections are then shown and explained to the parent so that the parent is able to use the book to assist their child when practicing at home. Under no circumstances should Suzuki students be using these books to read from. As mentioned previously, children are always able to speak at a higher level than they read when they are young native language learners. The same is true for music. Young learners will be able to play music written in Book 1 with ease after completing the Pre-Twinkle stage in their journey in learning the language of music. These pieces would be far beyond a beginners ability to read music if they were attempted to be used for note reading.

The Pre-Twinkle Stage

The Pre-Twinkle Stage is the first stage that spans from the child's very first lesson until they are finally prepared to aurally play the first pieces in Book 1. This stage of learning is extremely open-ended as there are many skills that need to be built and mastered by children before they will even be able to play the first piece in Book 1. For this explanation, I will base everything around a child learning the violin.

Beginning violin students first learn how to stand with tall, relaxed posture without an instrument. Students must be able to identify their violin hand from their bow hand, as well as skills such as matching pitch, keeping a steady beat, and maintaining focus for 30 seconds or longer. Only once these skills are established can the teacher and student begin learning how to set up the instrument.

Although every Suzuki teacher is unique, many Suzuki teachers use box or foam instruments and dowel rod bows to teach small children how to properly and safely hold

and set up the instrument. This is to prevent injury to an expensive instrument because accidents often happen when students are first learning correct instrument handling and placement. Suzuki teachers will often start working on correct right hand placement on the bow during the beginning lessons, as forming a bow hold can often be one of the most difficult skills to develop when playing the violin. Some Suzuki teachers have their students complete as many as 500 repetitions of correct bow hand placement on the dowel rod bow before student can earn their real bow. Similar amounts of repetition are needed for students to learn the steps to place the violin on the correct spot on the body independently and with accuracy. After dedicated practice where all of these skills are developed, the real violin and bow are earned and the student begins to produce a sound on their violin. When the student plays with their bow on their violin for the first time, they have worked so hard to get to this point that often the child and the parent will cry with joy when they hear the beautiful tone of their first pitch that they have ever played.

Using this beautiful sound that has been developed over time, students begin aurally learning preparatory pieces to continue building all of the musical, instrumental, and coordination skills needed to be able to play the *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star Variations A*, the first piece in Book 1. Additionally, there are many little songs aurally passed around the Suzuki community such as *The Flower Song* and *The Monkey Song* that are between one and eight pitches long to help students learn how the violin works, how different fingers on the strings make different sounds, and the body mechanics necessary to play each of these pitches with a beautiful tone, good intonation, and rhythmic accuracy.

The time frame of the Pre-Twinkle process can vary wildly from student to student. From my experience I have discovered some factors that can affect the duration of the process such as (a) whether they grew up in a musically immersive environment, (b) if they have already developed skills prior to violin study such as keeping steady beat and the ability to match pitch and rhythm, (c) as well as factors such as the age of the students and the consistency and duration of at home practice. It is often very difficult for parents to understand the open-endedness of the Pre-Twinkle stage, so to help them come to terms with the flexibility of the timeline, many teachers will provide parents with the list of skills that need to be mastered before students can begin playing the repertoire in Book 1. Once students have shown mastery in each of these areas, they are ready to begin Book 1.

Book 1

Book 1 begins with *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, Variation A*. This piece uses the pitches for *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* but with the rhythm, as shown in Figure 2, Dr. Suzuki called “Taka Taka Ta Ta” (Suzuki, 1971, p.24). This rhythm would be difficult to teach to children if they were learning to read music for the very first time, but for children imitating sound and learning aurally, this rhythm feels extremely easy and natural.

Figure 2

“Taka Taka Ta Ta” Rhythm



Before every piece in Book 1, there is a concept that will be learned in order to play the piece as intended. These concepts are intended to be taught by a highly trained teacher and are not written in the Books. This is to preserve the integrity of the Suzuki Method and make sure that everybody who has the title of Suzuki teacher is teaching to the exact same high standards that Dr. Suzuki expected. This is explained in number 3 and 4 of Dr. Suzuki's conditions for developing great ability: 3) "Use the finest teaching method" and 4) "Provide a great deal of training" (Suzuki & Nagata, 1981, p. 23).

Suzuki Instruction in Practice

There are several different ways that a Suzuki lesson can look depending on the environment they take place. Traditionally, Suzuki lessons are taken outside of school. Lessons are private with the teacher, parent, and student, and are given on a weekly or sometimes semi-weekly basis. However, the private lesson is only part of the Suzuki experience. In addition to a weekly, or semi-weekly private lesson, students also attend weekly group classes. These classes are homogenous in nature, meaning only one instrument rather than mixed instrumentation, and are multilevel. This allows younger, less advanced students to see older, more advanced students and learn from them in a non-formal setting. This is still a typical environment in the Suzuki community today. Teachers have a studio of students who are almost exclusively taught the teacher's primary instrument. They receive one private lesson a week and one group class a week. Although the group classes are multi-level, most teachers have several group classes so as to be able to give more personalized instruction to every student. Typically, this keeps the beginning Suzuki students from playing with the teenage students who have been playing

for many years, but still allows young beginners to see students a little older than them playing literature a little beyond where they are.

Suzuki in the Schools is a different branch of the Suzuki Method and the Suzuki Association of the Americas that works with public schools during the school day as opposed to a private studio outside of the school day. The Suzuki Association of the Americas (2006) describes Suzuki in the Schools as the “utilization of ...the Suzuki method and philosophy for any elementary or secondary, public or private school program wishing to incorporate Suzuki into their instruction and curriculum”. There is no one program that looks exactly like the other, just as there is no private studio that is set up just like another.

There are four possible models to teach Suzuki in the School, as shown in Table 3, that the Suzuki Association of the Americas (2006) has listed: the “Traditional Model,” “Modified Suzuki with Like Instrument Classes,” “Modified Suzuki in Mixed Instrument Classes,” and “Suzuki Philosophy Mastery.” After the “Traditional Suzuki” model, which is as close to a typical Suzuki studio as a public school can get, is the “Modified Suzuki with Like Instrument Classes” model. This model includes homogenous classes with like instruments, rather than a private or semi-private lesson. Parent education for the parents of the students in the program is present, but parents are not involved in classes or lessons like they are in the “Traditional Suzuki” model. Students learn their music by ear similar to the “Traditional Suzuki” model, but also learn by rote, or by watching their teacher model and imitating their fingers and bows. Students are also provided with fingered and bowed sheet music for home reference since parent involvement is not required. Similarly to the “Traditional Suzuki” model, students are not

taught note reading until they show basic development in intonation and technique and note reading is taught independently from instrument technique.

The third model for Suzuki in the Schools is “Modified Suzuki in Mixed Instrument Classes.” This model is identical to the previously mentioned “Modified Suzuki with Like Instrument Classes” model, except that multiple instruments are taught at the same time. As a result, the Suzuki repertoire must also be modified to allow students to cohesively play together in the same key. In this model, most of the repertoire is modified for students to play in the key of D so that violin, viola, cello and bass can all play the same repertoire together.

The final model listed on the Suzuki in the Schools page of the Suzuki Association of the Americas (2006) is the “Suzuki Philosophy Mastery” model. In this model, the concept of mastery of every step is used for technique concepts. In most other ways, this modified approach is very similar to the traditional orchestral approach to instrumental education that will be discussed in the next section. This model is recommended for the traditional sixth grade orchestra class.

Table 3*Comparison of Different Suzuki in the Schools Accepted Model*

	“Traditional Suzuki”	“Modified Suzuki with Like Instrument Classes”	“Modified Suzuki in Mixed Instrument Classes”	“Suzuki Philosophy Mastery”
Private or Semi-Private Lessons	x			
Group Classes with Like Instruments	x	x		
Group Classes with Mixed Instruments			x	x
Parental Involvement in Lessons or Group Classes	x			
Delayed Reading	x	x	x	x
Learns Repertoire by Rote		x	x	x
Learns Repertoire by Ear	x			
Listening Required	x			
Suzuki Repertoire In Key Original to the Instrument	x	x		
Suzuki Repertoire in Transposed Keys			x	
Uses Suzuki Philosophy	x	x	x	x

There are four Suzuki in the Schools programs in the state of Texas that have tried to stay as close to the “Traditional Suzuki” environment as possible. These programs are housed in multiple elementary campuses in Hurst-Euless-Bedford Independent School District, Prosper Independent School District, Greenville Independent School District, and at Parker Elementary, a public magnet school in Houston Independent School District. Just like the typical Suzuki studio, a strong emphasis is placed on the importance of the Suzuki triangle. Students are taught a weekly private or semi-private lesson with parents in attendance, students participate in weekly group classes, and parents and students are expected to practice together at home as partners in practice. Teachers in each of these programs are expected to have taken instrument specific Suzuki book training for each of the instruments that they teach and be consistently continuing their education with Suzuki teacher developments in addition to their summer teacher trainings. These districts attempts to stay as true to the “Traditional Suzuki” model are reaffirmed by Holt (2010) who states “schools that use some of the Suzuki tenets, but do not engage in a pure Suzuki philosophy may struggle to find an appropriate balance” (p. 5).

For the purposes of this essay, when discussing the Suzuki method or Suzuki in the Schools, I referred exclusively to the “Traditional Suzuki” model that was originally developed rather than the modified models mentioned above. Similarly, when I discussed the teacher training process, I discussed the individual book trainings required for the “Traditional Suzuki” model rather than the “Suzuki in the Schools Training” that is offered for those teachers who have no other option than to teach using one of the modified models.

Traditional Instrumental Pedagogy

Traditional instrumental pedagogies are those teaching strategies that have been used traditionally throughout the history of each of their instruments and are still most frequently used today. Traditional instrumental pedagogies are what most instrumental programs around the United States typically use (National String Project Consortium, n.d.). There are many different method books that contain different music or perhaps a slightly different order in which concepts are introduced, but the teaching strategies remain akin to one another (Ware, 2021).

The Traditional Lesson in Practice

The traditional string teaching approach provided to students in public schools often begins in late elementary or middle school years, most commonly beginning in grade 6. Beginning classes are typically homogenous or in classes with like instruments (National String Project Consortium, n.d.). For instance, violins would have a class with just violins while violas, cellos, and basses might be paired together due to the similarity in string or sounds. Another example could be pairing violins and violas together in a class due to their identical setup while cellos and basses have a class together due to their similar setup. There are many different formations that orchestra director's use in their classes based on personal preference; however, students in traditional programs almost always begin by sitting in chairs from the first lesson so that they can learn the proper sitting posture to be used in orchestra.

Students often begin making sounds on their instruments and learning how to read music from the very first class. K. Johnson (personal communication, January, 2013) advised his music education classes to always make sure that students made a sound on

their instrument by the end of the first class. I will be speaking about the first class through the lens of a violin beginner class. The first class of the year will often cover a large amount of material including, how to safely unpack the instrument, how to place a sponge or should rest onto the violin, how to sit with correct posture, and how to place the instrument correctly on the body. The bow is often left in the case and taught separately and at a slower pace unless one is using the method book *String Explorer: An Explorer's Guide to Teaching Strings* (Dabczynski, Meyer, & Phillips, 2002) which teaches bowing in one of the first lessons (Ware, 2021). In addition to these steps, students will also learn how to read their first written notation. Method books, such as *Essential Elements for Strings* (Allen, Gillespie, & Hayes, 2004), include a brief explanation on beat, the staff, bar lines, measures, as well as introducing students to the quarter note and quarter rest and where the pitches D and A are located on the staff. Although students may not be able to play a full line of music in the book on the first day, they are often taught what the pitch and rhythm look like and are taught how to pluck it without the bow on the instruments following the lesson in notation.

Another possible method book in the traditional approach to teaching, *Strictly Strings* (Dillon, Kjelland, & O'Reilly, 1992), moves at a comparatively more pedagogically appropriate pace for students (Ware, 2021). Pitches are introduced slowly and never more than two pitches are introduced on the same page. According to Ware (2021), this is the method book that would be most beneficial to students in the traditional string classroom.

As one can see, each traditional string program will look different depending on which method book the teacher chooses to use. These various string curricula all have

different focuses and priorities: some teach notes on the staff immediately, some focus on bowing and plucking as a primary priority, while others focused on where notated pitches live on the instrument (Ware, 2021). I believe that this can lead to inconsistency from school to school. I further argue that following a method book can restrict teacher creativity, ability, and best teaching practices as students are following a method book and not necessarily the guidance of their teacher.

Traditional Instrumental Pedagogy

As classes continue throughout the school year, students are frequently taught how to read the musical notation of a pitch or a rhythm before learning how to play the pitch or rhythm on the instrument. In the *Essential Elements for Strings* books (Allen, Gillespie, & Hayes, 2004), pitches and rhythms are introduced one or two notes at a time with pitches and rhythm used together (Ware, 2021). There are often several lines of music or short pieces that allow the student to build their fluency in reading and playing, and introduces new pitches and rhythms quickly. The students continue to build their reading vocabularies and fluency while developing their bow hold independently until as a group, the students are ready to use the bow in conjunction to playing the notation they are reading and learning. String teachers will often walk around their classroom making individual technical or set-up corrections for students while the class plays the music from the book together.

Comparing the Suzuki and Traditional Pedagogies

The Learning Process

As shown in Table 4, the processes for Suzuki learning and traditional learning can be very different. In native language acquisition and the Suzuki Method, there is a

period of babbling and learning how to speak or play the language through matching pitch or sounds and the development of stringing those sounds together to replicate what is being heard. There are many mistakes made, and lots of gentle correction made to support and help the child self correct. This process does not typically exist in traditional instrumental pedagogy. This is no surprise since the immersion process does not usually exist in traditional approaches due to the fact that some of these programs use method books that focus more on reading music than on listening. If a child has no experiential knowledge of the language of music, there is nothing to base this note discovery off of. Students can only know what they know.

Table 4*Table contrasting Suzuki and Traditional Pedagogy*

Suzuki Pedagogy	Traditional Pedagogy
Learned as a native language	Learned as a secondary language
Listening required to learn	No listening required to learn
Learns repertoire by ear	Learns repertoire by reading notation
Repetition of all learned repertoire	No repetition of learned repertoire after cumulative performance
Reading delayed until mastery of the instrument is shown	Reading begins from the beginning
Technique and set up taught separately from reading notation	Reading notation taught simultaneously with technique and set up
Parental involvement required	No parental involvement required
Combination of private lessons along with group classes	Only group classes
Regular teacher training encouraged and required	Further teacher training outside of college education optional
Contest is supplementary to learning and not required	Contest is priority for learning and required

Based on my own personal experience as student and as a teacher, the traditional approach is often taught very similarly to how many second languages are taught in schools. In all of my Spanish classes through school, both at the high school and

collegiate level, Spanish textbooks were used to teach phrases to students who wanted to learn Spanish as a second language in place of total language immersion. This could work, in theory, since students have a basis of their own language to compare the second language to. For examples, “hola” means “hello,” and with the guidance from the teacher students will learn that it is pronounced “oh-lah” rather than “Hah-lah” or “hoh-lay” or “hoh-lah.” But this experience often did not help peers in my classes to understand the flow of the language and how the accent sounded so that they could replicate it. This, at best, taught these students how to use their secondary language that they were learning very brokenly in a tough spot. This is why there are so many study abroad opportunities that exist for high school and college age students: so that they can have the immersion experience. Only once I participated in study abroad Spanish programs that were immersion focused, was I, and my classmates, finally able to really learn to speak the language fluently rather than just read it. I believe the traditional approach, just like the second language analogy above, will teach children how to read music and how to play the notes and rhythms on their instrument. However, also just like the secondary language analogy mentioned above, teaching this way does not allow students to fluently understand the language of music.

As part of fluently understanding the language of music, students need to build a strong listening vocabulary. In the traditional approach, listening is often treated as a supplementary activity rather than a foundational activity, as it is in Suzuki. Building this strong listening vocabulary through immersive listening allows Suzuki students the ability to learn their repertoire by ear mimicking the natural language learning process. Because students learning using the traditional approach are not provided an immersive

listening environment, many students are not able to learn repertoire by ear. They are only able to use the reading strategies taught to them by their teacher to navigate their playing.

Suzuki students take the musical repertoire learned and continue to play and improve on this repertoire throughout their entire musical journey. This repetition provides opportunities for students to work on higher-level technical and musical skills using familiar and comfortable pieces. Students in the traditional classroom are often preparing repertoire with the intent of performing this new literature at the next performance opportunity. Once this performance is complete, then the rehearsal of the literature ends and new repertoire is chosen to repeat the process. This cycle does not allow for opportunities to work on higher-level technical and musical skills using familiar literature, instead challenging students to learn new musical and technical concepts required from the repertoire while simultaneously trying to learn how to play the piece. This process can be far more difficult and frustrating as compared to building skills independently of learning literature.

As mentioned earlier, traditional students are taught from their first class how to read musical notation as the primary strategy for learning repertoire. Suzuki students, in addition to using repetition of familiar literature to build new skills, use the same reasoning to delay note reading. Trying to build two independent skills simultaneously can be arduous, so following native language acquisition modeling, Suzuki students take time to learn how to play the instrument fluently before learning how to read musical notation. This allows enough time for listening, singing, and playing vocabularies to be

developed as well as allowing students to exclusively think about their correct instrument placement, bow hold, and posture that is essential for fluent string playing.

In most traditional classrooms, there is no defined role or responsibility for the parent to participate in their student's musical journey. As a result, many traditional string programs start at a later age than most Suzuki programs. Suzuki students are able to start their musical journey at a very young age because of the intense involvement of the parent in the learning process. Parents are required to attend lessons as well as practice with their child at home. Young children need this parental support in order to make progress in learning the music language just as they do when they are learning a native language.

The traditional approach is most frequently taught using exclusively group classes. The Suzuki method believes that in order for children to learn the language of music most fluently, students and their parents should be provided with a combination of private lessons where children can receive individualized instruction for their personal musical growth, as well as group classes where students can learn in a social setting from their peers.

To be called a Suzuki teacher, registered training through the Suzuki Association of the Americas is required. As a Suzuki in the Schools teacher, this means that in addition to the required professional development provided to teachers during the school year, Suzuki teachers are expected and required to take additional book trainings. This is not a requirement for traditional approach teachers, although many directors decide to complete additional trainings, such as conducting workshops, in addition to the required professional development provided to teachers during the school year.

Contest and Competition in the United States

In the United States, contests and festivals are part of almost the entire history of music programs. In June 1923, the first contest for bands in the public schools was created by a coalition of the Chicago instrument vendors and the Band Instrument Manufacturing Association out of fear of a declining market for band instruments (Humphreys, 1989). The first orchestra contests took place across 15 states in 1928 after seeing the enthusiasm these competitions generated from the public (Humphreys, 1989). Since then contests have only grown more abundantly, in part driven by national enthusiasm for competition.

In Texas, this long history of festivals and contests has turned into the University Interscholastic League Concert and Sight-reading Festival. In public schools, secondary level music educators are required to take their band and orchestra ensembles to this contest every year to be evaluated on a prepared concert of repertoire from a list of acceptable music to be performed known as the Prescribed Music List (PML). The repertoire in the PML is all graded by level of difficulty. Ensembles are required to pick repertoire at certain grade levels depending on both school population size, and their varsity (typically top players) or non-varsity (typically younger, developing players) status. The larger the school population size, the higher the grade level is required of the repertoire prepared for the concert portion of the contest, regardless of ensemble size. In addition to this prepared concert, there is also a sight-reading component of the contest. In this portion of the contest, ensembles must be able to play a piece that has never before been seen or heard by the director or the students and be played with accuracy as an ensemble. Similar to the concert grade level requirements, the larger the school

population size, the more difficult the sight-reading literature is, regardless of ensemble size. However, programs that are part of a large population size school may choose to only send their ensembles to compete as non-varsity ensembles to lower these requirements. The concert portion of the contest is focused on musical ability of the students and the ensemble such as tone production, intonation, dynamic contrast and phrasing, and balance between instrument sections or musical lines within the ensemble (UIL Texas, 2020). If the contest were purely this prepared repertoire, it could be argued that there would not be so much anxiety about students needing to read music just as fluently as they play their instruments. However with the sight-reading part of the contest, students must be able to read a piece of literature specifically written for this contest that neither the director nor the students have heard, seen, or played before and they must read it with accuracy as an ensemble in their first time playing it. The level of reading is directly matched to the level of the ensemble's playing and so the students must be able to read music at the same level as their playing ability.

Note Reading

One of the biggest critiques commonly used to discredit Suzuki teaching is that students never learn how to read fluently. This is a common enough belief that many people will bring this critique up as fact upon discovering that I myself am a Suzuki teacher. This argument has gained some traction because the typical Suzuki student has an incredible ability to play just about anything by ear as a result of the Mother Tongue approach to learning and teaching the language of music. To a reader outside of the world of music education in the United States, this might seem a desirable skill. However, in the United States “many people divide musicians into two types: those who can read music

and those who play by ear” (Woody, 2012, p. 82). In other words, the attitude exists in the United States that students cannot be proficient in both playing by ear and reading music and therefore playing by ear is a detriment to student learning. The importance of needing to read music, as determined by the sight-reading portion of the contests in Texas and the United States, has placed the ability to read music at the same level as the ability to play the music.

Suzuki students are taught how to read music using a process similar to how students learn how to read in their native language. This process takes many years from the first development of speech to reading at the same level as which they speak, around six or seven years on average. For programs that start students on instruments in the 6th or 7th grade for the first time, this means that if they followed this same process, students would not be able to read as fluently as they played until graduated from high school. When traditional secondary teachers are given one year to teach their students how to play their instruments and read at the same level of their playing ability before they are evaluated at a contest, it is no wonder that the attitude exists that Suzuki students never learn to read or that Suzuki only works for young children. However, I would argue that it is not the Suzuki Method that is the issue, but the time and evaluation constraints that are placed on instrumental teachers. Smith (2006) found evidence to support that learning by ear does not negatively affect the ability to read music in secondary students despite the misconception that exists. Suzuki students who have built a fluency in the music language and are ready to begin learning how to read music often use the *I Can Read Music* (1991) books series. The books are broken down in a way that mirrors native language acquisition with the use of first learning pitches and rhythms that are already

being played at a high frequency. Once the pitches and rhythms are introduced and learned, they are practiced using disguised repetition. By the end of the books students are able to recognize, identify and fluently play the 16 pitches that exist in violin first position from G3 to A5; quarter notes, half notes, eighth notes, whole notes, sixteenth notes, dotted quarter notes, dotted half notes, quarter rests, eighth rests by themselves and in combinations; as well as the time signatures 4/4, 3/4, 2/4, 5/4, and 6/8.

Because the Suzuki Method is taught using the same process as that of learning a native language, as shown in Table 3, the playing ability of these students is not only extremely high, but the quality of playing ability is superior to those students who are taught to play their music while also learning how to read music. Frewen (2010) found that students who were familiar with a melody, played significantly more accurately and with higher levels of performance ability compared to those students who played an excerpt with no aural model. When given the time to understand and experience music and how the instrument works, more attention can be given to technique and set-up than when the student's focus is directed in multiple places when they are taught to read music at the same time as learning how to play the instrument. Gordon (2004) states that "simultaneously teaching the reading and writing of patterns raises difficulties since they involve different processes" (p. 12). When a foundation of excellent technique and set-up is built, the result is a beautiful tone, regardless of instrument. This along with the total immersion of music from a high level performer will lead to wonderful musicianship elements such as phrasing and dynamics, as well as beautiful tone.

"Talent education is life education" (Suzuki, 1983, p. 85). Dr. Suzuki believed that by working towards building a beautiful tone on the violin, what was really being

developed was beautiful character within his students. Dr. Suzuki survived the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II and believed that the way to save the world was to develop beautiful souls in children through the language of music.

As a Suzuki teacher, I believe his vision for teaching violin to children is still being met today. In my classroom I am using the outlying repertoire and the curriculum passed down from Dr. Suzuki through teacher trainers who have either studied with him or have learned from people who studied with him directly. I believe that through the Pre-Twinkle stage of learning, I am teaching students with the help of their parents to learn the language of music through the building of the different musical acquisition vocabularies (Gordon, 2004). Through these skills built in the Pre-Twinkle stage, students are able to utilize these skills to facilitate their own learning of future musical repertoire. As these skills grow, I begin introducing note reading in order to further develop their learning and to allow the student to be able to participate in orchestra and other ensembles that require note reading ability. Through this process, I believe I am, with the help of the student and the parent, educating the whole child and truly allowing students to reach their full musical potential.

CHAPTER 4

MUSIC AND DYSLEXIA

In the previous chapters, the Suzuki Method was discussed in the capacities of the its philosophy as compared to other famous educational philosophies, how the philosophy is supported by developmental research, and how the philosophy is used compared to the traditional instrumental music classroom. The Suzuki Method is built upon the idea that every child can learn the language of music, and children with language-based learning disabilities are not excluded from this belief. This chapter will examine the benefits of using the Suzuki Method with children who struggle with language-based learning disabilities, particularly dyslexia.

Dyslexia

When discussing language-based learning disabilities, the most prevalent learning disability is dyslexia. According to the International Dyslexia Association (2002), dyslexia can be defined as “specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.” In music, students with dyslexia can exhibit difficulties with rhythm and motor skills due to timing and processing abilities (Overy, 2000). However, students seem to have no difficulty with pitch skills (Overy, 2003). The rhythmic and motor skill deficits can make playing an

instrument extremely difficult. “Anecdotal reports suggest that children with dyslexia often experience difficulties with learning to play a musical instrument. This is not surprising when one considers dyslexic’s typical deficits in auditory, motor skills and timing skills as well as automatization and co-ordination skills” (Overy, 2000, p. 220). These difficulties can become exponentially more difficult when teaching reading of musical notation simultaneously with learning the language of music and playing a musical instrument. Jaarsma, Ruijsenaars, & Van den Broeck (1998) found that students with dyslexia needed more time than students without dyslexia to learn musical notation. Even when given more time, they found that students with dyslexia make “almost twice as many mistakes” (p. 151) when reading passages of music as compared to those without dyslexia. The study ultimately concluded that students with dyslexia “are able to learn musical notation, but that they experience considerable difficulty with the automatization of this system of conventions” (p. 152). They further claim that less energy should be spent trying to teach students with dyslexia “the explicit naming of notes” (p. 153).

Learning to read musical notation would then be integrated in its application to the playing of an instrument. Particular emphasis would have to be placed on becoming familiar with the constantly shifting patterns of musical notation. Knowledge of subpatterns and of separate notes would, in this way, be implicitly acquired and reinforced. Only when a reasonable proficiency is attained at this level should we implement an explicit phase to make the pupil aware of the more specific body of knowledge. (Jaarsma, Ruijsenaars, & Van den Broeck, 1998, p. 153)

In other words, the authors believe that students with dyslexia, especially those in instrumental music programs, should be taught the language of music through the processes of listening, singing, and playing as discussed by Gordon (2004), a music education researcher, before being taught to read musical notation.

The Mother Tongue Approach and Students with Dyslexia

Students with dyslexia often struggle with different aspects of language (Darrow, 2009; International Dyslexia Association, 2002), so too can these same students struggle with musical language acquisition (Overy 2000; Overy 2003; Jaarsma et al., 1998). It could be argued then, that the processes that occur naturally with language acquisition should also be used with musical language acquisition. Students with dyslexia can often struggle with timing and motor skills, so more time is often needed remediating these skills through the cycle of listening, singing, and playing in order to build skills to the same levels of those students without dyslexia. Darrow (2009) believes more time should be spent in the listening stage for those students who struggle with language-based learning disabilities. This includes the need for music teachers to provide an abundant modeling in order for the student to successfully build up to the singing vocabulary from their listening vocabulary skills. These processes may be slow to show evidence of success, but the skills built over time should still be evident based on a system of mastery.

The Suzuki Method's Mother Tongue approach is one that approaches teaching music to children as a native language and may help children with dyslexia in many ways. This process always begins with the listening stage in order to begin building a vocabulary that can be used in later stages of learning. After the listening stage begins,

the singing stage develops where students practice using the listening vocabulary with their singing voices as I stated earlier in this manuscript. This is comparable to the talking stage in native language acquisition. Occurring concurrently with the singing stage is the playing stage as it applies to instrumental music. In language acquisition this is called the thinking stage where vocabulary that has been learned and practiced is being put into more varied combinations. The process from listening to singing to playing is cyclical and constantly building upon itself to higher and higher levels. Note reading is delayed in the Suzuki Method until a fluent vocabulary in the listening, singing, and playing stages are mastered. This process also occurs naturally in native language acquisition. Children often take three to four years to even begin learning how to formally read their native language after they first begin using and building on their speaking vocabulary (Gordon, 2004). The Suzuki Method imitates this same process and timeline when working with young children learning the language of music through the Mother Tongue approach.

Music Intervention to Assist with Language-Based Learning Disabilities

Using the strategies in the music classroom mentioned above does not have a one-sided effect of benefiting musical ability. Using music, students can also show progress in overcoming their deficiencies in their native language acquisition. Habib, et al. (2016) found that through the use of a “specially-designed Cognitivo-Musical-Training (CMT)” (p. 1) program based on “music-language analogies,” “temporal and rhythmic features of music,” and “cross-modal integration” (p. 1), students with dyslexia showed improvements in the areas of “auditory attention, pseudo-word repetition, reading words repetition, reading words in 1 minute, phonological, awareness (phonemes fusion), and comparison of letter strings.” (p. 11). By using music, students improved in the areas of

deficiencies in their native language caused by their learning disabilities. This study does not stand alone in its findings. Overy (2003) finds classroom music participation had a “positive effect on both phonologic and spelling skills” (p. 497). The benefit to music intervention for language-based learning disabilities is that it can be used “at any stage of literacy development and at any age, from pre-school to high school” (p. 503). Overy (2000) describes that music as an intervention for language-based disabilities can be extremely effective because “music training, requiring very accurate timing skills can offer a medium for the development and improvement of temporal processing ability, and thus may provide a valuable form of extra remediation for dyslexic children” (p. 218).

Implications in the Suzuki Classroom

For students with language-based learning disabilities such as dyslexia, music education plays a vital role in both native language acquisition as well as musical language acquisition. Music interventions such as clapping/patting, rhythmic and timing games, and modeling and imitating singing can be extremely beneficial in helping these students build better timing, modal, and motor skills, as well as be able to read and communicate with more ease. These strategies that are vital to students with language-based learning disabilities are also extremely effective for students without dyslexia. So then, it would make sense to structure the music classroom environment to be universally inclusive for all students regardless of disability. However, numerous studies have found that many teachers are not given a satisfactory amount of training to successfully implement a universally inclusive learning environment. Wong & Chik (2016) found that while teachers are overwhelmingly supportive of a learning environment that promotes every child’s potential and value in society regardless of learning ability, the lack of

professional knowledge in how to manage an inclusive classroom confirms the need for more specific training strategies to ensure its successful implementation. Frisque, Niebur, & Humphreys (1994) found that while more than 94% of teachers have taught students with special needs, less than 40% have received any training in how to work with special needs students, and those that had overwhelmingly found the training to be inadequate. Teachers surveyed for the study also “affirmed that they lack sufficient preparation time (89%) and resources (69%) to individualize instruction for mainstreamed students in music” (p. 102). Hammel & Darrow (2017) state that “music and other classroom educators generally have no course in special education” (p. 13) during their college tenure and this is the only training on working with special needs students received during their entire teaching career. McCord & Watts (2006) also bring to light the fact that many times music educators “are often unaware which students in their classrooms have disabilities and don’t know how to adapt instruction to meet these students’ needs” (p. 28).

The lack of training and support received, as well as a lack of awareness of those who suffer from language-based learning disabilities; however, does not excuse music educators from creating an inclusive music-learning environment. It is the role of the music educator to create a learning environment that will lead to success of every student regardless of learning disability. Mazur (2004) encourages music educators to reach out to “arts directors, administrators, fellow teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, aides, and parents” (p. 7) if ever they feel unsure how to create a successful inclusive learning environment for their special needs students. Mazur also suggests some specific strategies such as “dancing, dramatizing, and moving” (p. 9) to

help students learn musical concepts. Darrow (2010) states unequivocally “all students deserve the opportunity to make music and to experience the thrill of playing or singing with others” (p. 42). Therefore, music educators should plan all lessons with accommodation or modifications in mind so that every student can participate in and learn music at a level that is appropriate for where they are musically. An accommodation “allows a student to complete the same assignment or activity as other students in the class but is offered a change in assessment procedures such as test formatting, test setting, amount of time needed, or type of response required” (Darrow, 2010, p. 42). However, “a modification is used when students are not able to complete the same audition or test requirement or are unable to participate in the same way as the rest of the class because of the nature of their disability”(Darrow, 2010, p. 42).

The Suzuki Method, if taught using the Traditional Model, incorporates mastery learning at both an individual level, as well as in instrument specific group classes that are based around accommodation and modification due to their multi-level format. This allows children with special needs to be completely successful regardless of their disability: the constant mastery of every step when building new skills in a private or semi-private lesson allows assignments learning goals to be completely individualized, while group classes allow students to build the skills they already have with a group of children at varying levels. This combination of learning environments ensures that a child is never ahead or behind any other students, but rather is learning at a pace that allows mastery of skills. Just as a child with a language deficiency, due to a learning disability, will learn their native language and all the skills to be able to use it effectively within society at a pace that is appropriate for them with the right strategies and interventions, so

too does that ability exist within music. By using the Mother Tongue approach to teaching music, students can learn music in a natural, intuitive way, while building their skills using individualized strategies and interventions.

Students with dyslexia are able to speak their native languages with the same ease as those students without dyslexia. By learning their language by ear, they are able to learn the language without the same difficulties that present themselves when students with dyslexia learn to read. As Suzuki (1983) recognized “ Children everywhere in Japan are speaking Japanese” (p. 1). Children all over Japan are able to speak Japanese with no formal training whatsoever. If music were taught using the same strategies as learning to speak a native language, then students with dyslexia would be able to learn the language of music with the same ability that they learn to speak their native language. Just as native language acquisition is not learned in a vacuum, neither should music language acquisition. The Suzuki Method requires students to actively listen to high-level recordings of the repertoire to be learned long before students learn this repertoire. This is the first step to learning by ear.

Children learn to speak by being totally immersed in the language they are trying to learn. Many hours are spent listening to the sounds of their environment, such as their parent or their siblings, before a child is able to form words. So too, is the language of music learned. By developing this listening vocabulary, students with dyslexia will be able to replicate the sounds they are hearing without using any visual processing. Total immersion cannot happen for children without parental support and participation. Babies will not learn to speak as quickly if there is no parent speaking to them and giving them the listening vocabulary needed to develop the speaking vocabulary. The Suzuki Method

relies just as heavily on parental involvement. It is the parents' role to facilitate the constant immersive listening and speaking environment. Just as with children who do not have an adult to speak to them with frequency, not having a parent to assist with immersion will not stop a child from learning a speaking vocabulary. However, having an adult provide an immersive environment for the child will guarantee a much higher level of rapid success than those without.

When in a completely immersive environment, repetition is impossible to avoid. Children thrive with repetition when learning anything new, whether it is their native language or the language of music. As mentioned previously, students diagnosed with dyslexia are often more successful when given activities that provide repetition. The Suzuki Method believes that repetition with purpose is one of the most effective ways to learn the language of music. Students are asked to consistently practice the same musical repertoire on a daily basis while at the same time continuing to learn new repertoire. This gives students a constant repertoire that is ready for performances as well as a universal language that can be played with any other child that is familiar with the same repertoire, thus providing them with much needed socialization through music.

Children develop their native language speaking vocabulary, once they have built their listening vocabulary, with social interaction with other children. The Suzuki Method uses this same belief in musical language acquisition. Group class is an important part of the musical language acquisition where children can socialize and learn from each other in a musical setting. For children with dyslexia, this could be one of the most beneficial ways to learn the language of music: from seeing other students their age or musical ability and learning from them in a safe, informal environment.

Up to this point, every strategy that Suzuki provides as a benefit to music learning for students with dyslexia has been about learning music as a native language. In native language learning, reading is delayed until a certain fluency of language is developed. This is also true for the Suzuki Method. This could be one of the most important strategies that could be beneficial for students with dyslexia as often reading with fluency and comprehension is the area that these students struggle with the most. Just as students with dyslexia are expected to learn how to read in their native language, they too should learn how to read music. The *I Can Read Music* books (Martin, 1991) break down note reading in a way that naturally mimics the language acquisition process.

The *I Can Read Music* (1991) books are a series of books written by a Suzuki teacher and frequently used by Suzuki string teachers as the first introduction to note reading. Just as books for small children use large print, so are the *I Can Read Music* books. Martin separates pitches and rhythms as two separate concepts on individual pages to be learned independent of one another. This allows students to fully focus on one aspect of note reading at a time. The book begins by introducing only two pitches on the pitch part of lesson one and two rhythms on the rhythm side of lesson one. The first pitches of the Violin Book 1 introduce the pitches A and B, with A being the pitch that violin students play and sing with the most frequency and B being in close proximity and frequently used in students playing. However, this should only be taught once the student has a strong fluency of the language they are learning. These two pitches are played in different combinations in four measure increments for a total of 16 notes per line. There are five staves per pages using these patterns with only the pitches A and B. This both provides the repetition that young children need to be successful as well as allow students

to recognize these pitches in many different contexts. The book continues to work exclusively on these pitches for several chapters before finally adding the pitch C#. Once this new pitch is added, students continue building fluency through repetition, once again, for several chapters. The books continue to progress this way until students are able to read all 16 pitches that exist in first position on the violin fluently from G3 to A5. The rhythm pages of the book are introduced in a similar way. The books first introduce quarter notes and half notes as these are the rhythms played in the Suzuki repertoire up to this point. In these rhythm lessons students are continuing to repeat different patterns using exclusively quarter and half notes, but Martin also introduces different time signatures to practice these two rhythms. Students learn how to play these two rhythms in the context of 4/4, 3/4, 2/4, and 5/4 time. This disguised repetition takes place over eight lessons before a new rhythm is finally introduced: two eighth notes. The books continue to progress this way until students are able to recognize, identify, and play quarter notes, half notes, eighth notes, whole notes, sixteenth notes, dotted half notes, dotted quarter notes, quarter rests, eighth rests, and combinations of the aforementioned rhythms and rests. This progression mirrors the native language acquisition process of learning to read only what students have already built in their listening and speaking vocabulary.

A child can be fluent in a language without knowing how to read just as a child can be extremely musical without knowing how to read. Reading is simply the next step in language learning that allows the child to participate in the fullest way possible as part of our literary society. To skip all of the aforementioned steps in language learning before jumping to reading will leave many children behind and feeling unsuccessful, especially those with language-based learning disabilities.

Within my own studio, I have noticed that students with dyslexia are able to participate successfully because of the very nature of how the Suzuki Method is taught and learned. Because students build their musical skills using a similar process to native language acquisition, many of the struggles that students with dyslexia face in the traditional music classroom are not evident in the Suzuki environment. Delaying note reading until students are able to play their instrument fluently has been one of the biggest successes in my Suzuki classroom. Learning to read musical notation is often a slower process for my students with dyslexia than my students without dyslexia; however, the slow nature of developing their musical reading skills does not stunt their musical growth or their ability to play their instrument and learn the language of music because they have a strong foundation of a listening, singing, and playing vocabulary to draw from. The Suzuki Method naturally allows all children to learn the language of music to their fullest potential regardless of whether the student has a learning disability.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

As discussed previously, the Suzuki Method, also known in this manuscript as the Mother Tongue approach or Talent Education, is a method of teaching young children music as if it were a native language. The components of this unique method of teaching music include an environment of musical immersion created by the parents; parents working with the child and the teacher in lessons and in practice at home; learning music using the stages similar to those of language acquisition; using fractional sized instruments to fit the child comfortably; a combination of private lessons and group classes; and delayed note reading.

Although this combination of components is exclusive to the Suzuki Method, many of these components are similar to many other educators' philosophies and strategies. Having parents play an important role in their child's education was an idea held similarly by Pestalozzi over two centuries ago. Learning music in similar stages to learning a language was seen in practices used by Mason, who is considered the father of music education (Abeles, Hoffer, & Klotman, 1994). Having children play on fractional sized instruments that fit children comfortably matches Montessori's beliefs that children should use manipulatives that were sized to the child. Providing opportunities for both private lessons and group classes followed Pestalozzi's thinking that children should not exclusively learn the material being taught by the teacher, but also learning from other children around them. Delaying note reading until the ability to participate in music was fluent was used in Mason's teaching in the Boston Public Schools. All of these educators

mentioned; Pestalozzi, Montessori, and Mason; were seen as pioneers in the field on education and are often credited with moving education forward to where it is today.

All of these practices by Suzuki and the other educational pioneers lend themselves to a completely inclusive environment, regardless of disability. These practices were designed to mimic natural learning and allow every student to be successful. Students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia can often find themselves left behind with traditional music education teaching strategies. However, by incorporating more activities to mimic the language acquisition process as it applies to music, the students may find themselves able to participate in classes more successfully. The Suzuki Method lends itself so seamlessly to the musical language acquisition process and could be a great teaching method for instrumental teachers to incorporate in their inclusive music classrooms.

Although Suzuki developed his method using observation and creative instruction rather than traditional research that would be expected now, current research tends to support his philosophies and teaching methods. Halpern (2016) theorizes that baby's brains are not born with knowledge of language pre-wired into their brains. Instead, Halpern believes that these brains are formed and developed by the language that surrounds and immerses them. Gordon (2004) believes this is true also in music. Although music is not a grammatical language like a native language, it is learned and processed in a similar manner using similar regions of the brain. By learning music as a native language, young children's brains are formed and developed by music if provided an immersive environment of high-quality music. Additionally, Suzuki's beliefs on character development are also reinforced by research such as a study by Kalliopuska &

Ruokonen (1993) who found that empathy and prosociability could be developed using music. Furthermore, Saarikallio (2011) found that emotional regulation skills learned through music study in childhood carried through adulthood.

With similar practices and philosophies to those of well-respected educators, benefits to students with disabilities and the ability to make music learning more inclusive, as well as having the support of current research, one might think that the Suzuki Method should be taught in every public school setting. So why are there not more traditional Suzuki model programs in the schools?

Obstacles for Suzuki in the Schools Implementation

The Suzuki Method is an effective way to develop young musicians who are able to fluently understand and play the music as if it were a native language. So why then do only four public school programs exist in the state of Texas? There are a number of reasons that may cause school districts not include implementing a Suzuki program rather than a traditional string program: funding, concerns regarding parental participation, and a culture of assessment as a measure of accountability to name a few.

As with everything in public education, funding is always a concern, especially when discussing the viability of fine arts programs. Using the Suzuki Method provides a wonderful individual and group experience for every child in the program. However, by providing instruction for each child, the number of students that can be assigned to any one public school teacher becomes limited compared to traditional string programs. In many private Suzuki studios, having between 30 and 40 students would be considered a full load of students. When it comes down to numbers, a teacher serving 50 or more students in a group setting could be seen as a better financial option for a school district.

Hurst-Euless-Bedford ISD has set a cap of 49 students per Suzuki teacher in the district to allow teachers to reach the highest number of students on their campus without overburdening the teachers with an unmanageable student load. In a traditional string program at an elementary level, the teacher could see up to 120 students, so it could be argued that funding a traditional string program rather than a Suzuki program would make a bigger impact for a smaller financial investment.

Another concern for many districts is the parental involvement required of the Suzuki Method. I believe the overwhelming majority of parents want to be involved in their children's life and education. It can be difficult to do though when as a parent you are unsure how to help your child with their schoolwork. I believe this is also the case for music programs. I believe many parents are uninvolved in their student's musical lives, not because they do not care, but because they are unequipped to help their child at home. With the Suzuki Method, parents are required to be part of the process for teaching their child. These parents work miracles to be able to attend their child's lesson during the school day, arranging their work schedule around the lesson time, coming to lessons during lunch breaks, or even finding grandparents, or other family members to step in to attend lessons, record the lesson, and take notes so that the parents take part in the amazing musical journey with their child. Sometimes a work meeting will come up for a parent, or their work schedule changed at the last minute. During working hours, this is unavoidable every once in a while. However, as a whole parents want to show up for their lesson time.

In the Suzuki in the Schools programs, there is no formal assessment or contest required for Suzuki students. The premise of the Suzuki Method is learning at one's own

pace. This runs counter to the common belief in public education that assessment is necessary for teacher and students accountability and growth. Students begin high stakes, high-pressure state testing as young as 3rd grade in the state of Texas. The data recorded from these assessments are also not only to determine student's growth from year to year, but to hold teachers accountable (Szabo, 2015). A certain percentage of students need to perform well on the test to prove that teachers are teaching effectively. However, some of the common criticism of standardized testing includes that simple fact that children are not all the same. Some children are coming from households where language learning and informal reading began before their formal education begins in Kindergarten whereas some families have never learned to read anything until their formal education begins in Kindergarten. This leaves gaps in students learning, and the need to push children to learn at a pace that might be faster than the pace they need to be able to fully master a concept. The Suzuki Method focuses on students learning at their own pace and having total mastery of every concept before moving onto a new and more challenging concept. The Suzuki process is a long-term process that often does not produce immediate results. However, with opportunities such as recitals, group concerts, and opportunities to play for other Suzuki teachers and receive feedback, Suzuki students are able to show at least some measure of success on a year-to-year basis.

Conclusion

The Suzuki Method, although not commonly seen in public schools across the country, is a great option for introducing instrumental music to young children regardless of disability in the inclusive music classroom. Although not as cost effective as a traditional strings teacher that could teach up to 40 students per class, a Suzuki program

set up to service 50 or fewer students a week would be serving a similar number of students as a typical traditional elementary string class. The benefit of Suzuki over a traditional elementary string class would be the individualized attention provided to each student rather than solely receiving instruction in a group setting. Parents would be supported to help their student at home if they were a mandatory part of lessons, so string instruction could begin at a younger age than usually seen in a traditional string classroom. The Suzuki Method in public schools would also allow students an opportunity to learn something at their own pace that is built on mastery and will help students develop a joy for learning. Although uncommon and being initially requiring more involvement to set up on a campus or in a school district, the benefits of a Suzuki education could have a long reaching positive effect on instrumental music and society.

As a Suzuki teacher teaching in the public schools, I consider myself profoundly fortunate. Every day I am allowed the opportunity to live and prove Dr. Suzuki's philosophy that "Every Child Can" (Suzuki Association of the Americas, 2020) regardless of financial ability to pay for Suzuki lessons, learning disabilities, or at what age their musical language acquisition process began. I believe that my students from, from a diverse population, have benefitted from this Suzuki music education. Some non-musical skills that my students have developed from their Suzuki education include more effective problem solving skills, the ability to remain focused for longer periods of time, emotional regulation, becoming life long learners, and the ability to cooperate and work with others. The musical skills that my students have gained through the Suzuki Method are numerous including, playing with exceptional tone, developing a good sense of intonation and rhythmic timing, transposing with ease, learning songs they have heard

without any assistance, and learning how to play with a group of people. Despite coming up with the method many years ago, the Suzuki Method falls in line with current research and continues to encompass a learning style that develops all of its music learners into musicians fluent in the language of music. It is a learning method that is completely inclusive and builds on mastery at the learner's own pace. In a time where inclusivity is of paramount importance in the music classroom, the Suzuki Method is a system that could allow every student to learn the language of music to his or her fullest potential.

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