What is the Suzuki Method?

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The Suzuki method is named after its originator, Shinichi Suzuki, a Japanese violinist and teacher born in 1898. He developed his method of teaching after noticing and thinking deeply about the fact that children learn to speak their native language very well and very easily. He believed that this “Mother Tongue Method” was the best educational method in the world and that all educators could benefit by incorporating elements of this “method” into other subject areas. Suzuki also believed that learning beautiful music helps children develop into better human beings, people with more compassion, love and appreciation of others.

Here are the basic tenets of his philosophy of education:

1. **“Environment” is the key to developing abilities.**
   
   Talent is not inborn, but is developed as the young child interacts and adjusts to his or her environment. Suzuki noticed that children imitate their parent’s mannerisms, accents, inflections, interests and hobbies. Perhaps what we see as inherited “talent” is actually the result of children raised in an environment that has developed certain abilities more than others. Parents can decided what they feel is important and which skills they want their child to develop; they can make adjustments in the child’s environment to encourage the development of these abilities. Suzuki refers to “talent” as “ability development” and calls his method “Talent Education”.

2. **The parents are the primary educators of young children.**
   
   Each child has a very strong heart-bond with his or her parents. The parents are also responsible for creating the environment for learning (mentioned above). In the Suzuki Method, we create a learning triangle of parent, student and teacher. The parent attends all lessons and classes and practices every day with the child. Most parents also learn the first songs that the child is studying. This assures a more complete understanding of the technical points involved in learning to play and motivates the child to imitate what he or she sees the parent doing. It can also help the parent understand the difficulties involved in learning to play an instrument and increase their patience with the learning process.

3. **Musical ability is developed at a very young age.**
   
   Children enjoy and respond to music from before birth. They can immediately benefit from a musical environment. It is helpful if the young child has been exposed to music through recordings and singing with the family for many years before formal lessons begin. Most Suzuki students begin lessons between the ages of three and five, but older children are not excluded.

4. **Daily listening develops an “ear for music”.**
   
   It has been shown that hearing is the first sense to develop; very young babies can recognize songs after they have heard them a number of times. In the Suzuki Method, students listen every day to recordings of the music they are studying and will study in the future. The more the student listens, the easier it is for him or her to learn the music. Children learn not only the melody and rhythm, but also the nuances of
phrasing, the construction of the piece and all the tiny details that older listeners sometimes don’t even notice. Creating a good environment for the growth of musical ability involves listening to music, attending concerts and enjoying live music.

5. **A positive approach works better than a negative one.**
Studies show that children learn material more thoroughly when they are having fun that when it is being forced on the in a negative way. The teacher and parent work together to motivate the child in a positive way so that lessons and practice are enjoyable.

6. **Music learning is a skill, which requires step-by-step learning and much repetition.**
Each small step is carefully mastered through daily practice. In language acquisition, the child repeats all of his or her vocabulary and slowly adds new words to the old, polishing all the time. With the Suzuki Method, students continue to play their entire repertoire, slowly adding new songs while repeating and polishing the old. Consequently, students always have a “concert” ready to perform. This may be one reason why student are very eager and comfortable performers!

7. **Children learn at their own pace.**
No child is hurried, but all children are encouraged to fulfill their own potential. Children understand that just as everyone learns to talk when they are ready, they also learn to play music at their own pace. Thus, the individual lesson is the core of the Suzuki Method and child is respected as a unique human being. Once lessons have begun, the establishment of a practice and listening routine is very important. Just as in language learning, music learning demands exposure and practice as a consistent and regular part of the child’s daily life.

8. **The standardized repertoire of the Suzuki Method is the “vocabulary” of the Suzuki student.**
Each instrument that utilizes the Suzuki Method follows its own graded repertoire. Children learn songs in the order they have heard on their recordings and played by the other Suzuki students. They look forward to learning these songs, which they have heard and seen performed. Since they have repertoire in common with their peers, they are always ready to perform as soloists or in groups.

9. **The social and community aspects of the Suzuki Method contribute to success.**
Children learn best, and are motivated to learn when they are involved with other children as well as their parents. Group lessons and shared individual lessons are an integral part of the Suzuki Method. There are many musical and social skills that young musicians can learn through group participation. Playing concerts and recitals with their peers gives everyone a sense of joy and satisfaction on a job well done.

10. **Children learn to play the instrument first, and then they learn to read music.**
Students do not begin reading until their ear is well developed and they are comfortable with the instrument. This usually takes a few years, depending on the student’s age. It seems normal to us that children speak for several years before learning to read. It is just as normal for children to play an instrument for several years before leaning to read music. Music reading is a skill that does need to be taught and Suzuki teachers have developed ways of doing this at the appropriate time for each individual child.

11. **Cooperation, rather than competition, makes learning easier and more fun.**
Motivation comes from having parents who are interested in music and from seeing and hearing others play, rather than from trying to be better than someone else. This cooperative spirit, coupled with a positive learning environment, is helping parents raise enthusiastic, motivated children who are well equipped to succeed in school and in life. Suzuki has always said that his goal is not to create professional musicians, but happier and more fulfilled human beings. Through this philosophy, his dream is coming true for children around the world.

12. The Suzuki Method encourages the development of the whole child.
Children who are given the opportunity to learn great music, and who are nurtured in a positive environment that respects their individual gifts, can grow into fine human beings with feelings of self worth. They are usually disciplined, cooperative people, who approach problems as challenges, know how to organize material and enjoy interacting with others. Suzuki’s dream was to help all children be happy, productive people. “Education through music!” *used with permission from the author