

Teaching Philosophy

The Suzuki Method

The Suzuki Method is comprised of three unique and equally important components: the Mother Tongue Method, the Suzuki Triangle, and the Repertoire.

The Mother Tongue Method refers to the idea that every child learns to speak his native language, no matter the distinct accent or dialect, because he hears it from birth. He is surrounded by it. Because of this, ability has been developed within him that is manifest when he speaks. Suzuki said that “man is the son of his environment” and this perfectly describes the Mother Tongue method. There are several steps that need to be taken to create an atmosphere where this ability is best developed.

1. Listening to recordings.
2. Creating a positive learning environment.
3. Accurate Repetition = Accumulation;

Suzuki said “ease come with training. We simply have to train and educate our ability, that is to say, do the thing over and over again until it feels natural, simple, and easy. That is the secret.”

4. Maintaining an attitude that every child can.

“Barring major brain damage or a rare major physical handicap, every child can learn to speak. And—what is more interesting for our purposes in looking at the mother tongue method of education—everyone in every child’s life has complete faith that he or she will learn to speak. All of us seem to accept that such a miracle, such a wonder, such a marvel of achievement will, in fact, happen (*Every Child Can*, Suzuki Association of the Americas, A5).

The Suzuki Triangle is made up of three equal sides representing the parent, student, and teacher working together. For the Triangle to function properly, each member needs to know their role and, especially for the parent, needs to identify his expectations. Parents need to be educated about what they can expect, not only what their child will be learning, but also how difficult playing an instrument is.

The Suzuki Repertoire is a cumulative program. It is laid out so that you take what you know and then you build on it.

“One ability is created first, then a new ability is built on it, and then another new one is put on top of the other, and so on one after another. One ability which is sufficiently developed breeds another greater ability, and so on, one ability after another. Thus abilities are great expanded and become more powerful and functional...”(*Nurtured By Love*, Suzuki).

Review is a vital tool in taking existing abilities and using them to develop greater abilities.

“Knowledge is not ability...children acquire ability while repeating what they have already learned.”

Listening

The Suzuki method emphasizes the ability to learn based on the importance of listening. Being familiar with melodies and rhythm patterns enables quicker mastery of pieces and an increased capacity for musicality. Listening for a minimum of 20 minutes a day to the Suzuki recordings and/or classical music enriches the musical vocabulary available and familiar to students. Play recordings. Make it a normal event to have classical music playing in your home.

In addition to listening, please take your children to classical performances. Attend Boston Symphony concerts. Go to local high school performances. Support your community orchestras. There are a wealth of performances available at New England Conservatory and other local schools that are free, open to the public, and exceptional. Exposing students to their future musical potential is important and often very motivating.

Practicing

Improvement is directly proportional to the amount of daily practice in the home. It is expected that students enrolled in half hour lessons will practice for a minimum of 30 minutes a day. Students enrolled in forty-five minute lessons should be spending an hour a day with their instrument, practicing their solo repertoire. Students should view practicing as giving themselves a lesson at home. Parents, I cannot stress enough the importance of your role in helping your child have a successful musical experience. With younger students, practicing needs to be monitored. Practice with your child. Come to their lessons and take notes. Feel free to contact me with any questions you might have. In the case of older students, you do not need to sit beside your child as he or she practices. But some monitoring is useful. Sit in the same room while they practice. Listen from the kitchen. Review their notebook and know what you should be listening for. Know what they are supposed to be practicing and how they should be practicing it. Most students cannot be left to themselves to practice regularly and correctly. Listen for counting, repetition, beautiful tone, and dynamics. IT SHOULD GENERALLY BE SLOW...

Very little, if any, progress will be made if students do not practice daily. Practicing should be looked at as a repeat of your weekly lesson at home. Assignments written down mirror what happens at lessons and should be repeated as accurately as possible. Please attend your child's lessons and be involved in his or her musical experience.

Private Lessons

Private lessons are scheduled once a week. Students are expected to attend regularly and to come prepared with past assignments and will all necessary materials. Parents are encouraged to attend and are required to observe the lessons of young or beginning students. Parent participation is vital to the Suzuki triangle created by the Student, the teacher, and the parent. Parents are expected to take notes to be used during daily practice at home, essentially enabling the parent to become the "home teacher."

Lesson content is determined by the student's preparation, what performances are coming up, and what I see as a student plays for me. I often assign small technical exercises that are preparing students for pieces in the future. Out of context they may seem silly or insignificant, but they are important and often need to be mastered before I will move students on.

Group Class

Attendance at group lesson is not optional and after school time slots are not available to those who do not attend. The purpose of group lessons is threefold.

1. The experience of playing and associating with other student musicians is not only inspiring but also introduces students to ensemble playing. Performing with peers mandates a certain level of preparedness that goes beyond lesson preparation.

2. A group lesson focuses on review material. This is not treading water. Continuous polishing of review material is necessary to layer in musicality—dynamics, emotion, ebb and flow. Musicality cannot be added to pieces until notes are mastered and it is most effectively accomplished in a group setting. Dr. Suzuki said that practicing actually begins after you know that notes. This is what we do at group lesson.

3. Playing at group lessons prepares students to participate in orchestra. Focus shifts when playing in a group. Instead of concentrating on posture, technique, and form, one focuses on being in the right place in the music at the right time. In the beginning it is a scramble to keep up and hopefully play the right notes. Nothing else matters. By being introduced to group playing before entering an orchestra program, attention can be directed to the things that really do matter. Bad habits are avoided and can be kept in check. Students often do not feel as picked on when an entire class is corrected instead of when they are corrected individually at a private lesson.

Again, group lessons are not optional. Parent attendance at group lessons is encouraged so this process can be observed and/or monitored. For group lesson times, please refer to the Studio Calendar.

Studio Class

Studio Class provides a performance opportunity for those preparing for recitals to perform in front of a small group of students—generally those also performing on the recital. Studio Class will be held once a month. Those performing on recitals are expected to attend. In these sessions, final touches will be made to prepared pieces and concert etiquette reviewed. Attendance is not required if your child is not performing on the recital. They are welcome to come and participate as an audience member, but they will not be required to play unless they want to.

Recitals

Recitals are not final exams, but they do serve a valuable purpose in your child's musical development. They will be held frequently with the intent of achieving several individual goals.

- In preparing for a recital, practicing is more focused and productive.
- They provide opportunities for family involvement and positive reinforcement.

- Attending recitals and concerts is the only way to teach appropriate behavior in a formal setting. As a parent, it is expected that you will monitor your children and help them be respectful of those performing.
- While not intended to be a stressful situation, learning to play under the pressure of an audience takes one's playing capacity to the next level. It is one thing to play well at home or at a lesson and quite another to play well in public.
- Monitoring personal development made, not based on comparison to others, provides a tangible progress report.

Participation on recitals is expected. Student that are unprepared with not be invited to participate. Dates will be marked on the calendars well in advance. Please plan on attending.

Each semester there are three recitals, two are Solo Recitals and one is a Semester Recital.

Solo Recitals are where students play individually. For younger students, participation at one of these recitals is required. Older students will be expected to perform on both of them.

All students are expected to participate in the Semester Recital. At this recital, all groups perform selections studied throughout the semester, piano students play solos, and a handful of advanced students will be invited to play solo pieces. Dates for Semester Recitals will be distributed months in advance and are mandatory for all Miller Violin Studio students.

Concert Etiquette

Everyone participating on a recital should be there to hear the first performer and should stay until the last performer. It is inappropriate to arrive or leave in the middle of the recital. Arriving late or leaving early is distracting for the audience and especially for those performing. It is discourteous and diminishes the experience for the student. Do not ask to be placed at the beginning or end of the recital. Sunday dress is appropriate not only for the performers, but also for their families as well. Students participating in Semester Recitals should wear semi-formal black and/or white. Small children are welcome to attend, but should be closely supervised and taken out if necessary.

Books/Supplies/Materials

Every student has specific materials that need to be brought **to every lesson**. Attending lessons without the needed books is pointless.

For violin students, having good instruments directly effects the sound produced. In the early years of playing there are many things involved in connection with creating beautiful tone which are made much harder when using an instrument of poor quality. Good instruments can be found—for sale or for rent. Typically a trial period should precede the purchase of an instrument during which time I would love to hear and examine it. Every home should have a stand (of the appropriate height) which should be used during practice time. Time is spent weekly at lessons correcting posture and other set-up issues that is immediately negated when practicing without a stand.

Having access to a full size keyboard is mandatory for all piano students. All piano students should have a bench of the appropriate height or make necessary adjustments to their bench so they are able to play sitting tall with their hands in the correct position in relation to the keys.

Studio Policies

Tuition

Tuition is charged by Semester. Fall Semester is September through January. Spring Semester is February through June. The Summer Semester is 6 weeks long in July and August.

Fall and Spring Semester Tuition can be divided into monthly payments but must be paid by the fifth of the month. Summer Semester must be paid in full at the beginning of the semester. A late fee of \$15 will be assessed to all late payments. Tuition covers the following and is outlined below.

Violin

30 minute lessons: \$750 (\$150 per month)

45 minute lessons: \$1125 (\$225 per month)

1 hour lessons: \$1500 (\$300 per month)

Students from Pre-Twinkle to Book 2 take 30 minute lessons. Students in Book 3 – 4 are expected to take 45 minute lessons and all students Book 5 and above need 1 hour lessons.

Book 1 – 4 : 18 private lessons, 8 group classes, 5 Studio Classes, 1 Dress Rehearsal, 2 Solo Recitals, and 1 Semester Recital. The Semester Recital is mandatory. The Solo Recitals are not.

Book 5 and up: 18 Private Lessons, 5 Group Classes, 5 Studio Classes, 1 Dress Rehearsal, 2 Solo Recitals, and 1 Semester Recital. Students are expected to perform on at least one Solo Recital and the Semester Recital.

Summer Semester includes 5 private lessons, 5 group/fiddle classes, 5 theory classes (for Book 4 and up), and Tuning Up!, a week long camp held in July.

Piano

30 minute lessons: \$625 (\$125 per month)

I only teach beginning through intermediate piano students.

18 private lessons, 5 Studio Classes, 1 Dress Rehearsal, 2 Solo Recitals, and 1 Semester Recital. Students are expected to perform on one Solo Recital and the Semester Recital.

Summer Semester includes 6 private lessons, 2 duet lessons, 5 theory classes, and 1 Recital.

Tuition does not cover music, instrument rental/purchase, or Accompanist and Recital Hall fees. Accompanist and Recital Hall fees will be kept to a minimum and will be evenly divided among all participating students. They will vary based upon accompanist needs and recital locations.

If in the event that you need to stop taking lessons, I require one month's notice so I can make necessary arrangements to fill your time slot.

Attendance/Tardiness/Absences

Your lesson time is reserved for you. I try very hard to maintain a consistent teaching schedule and I understand that conflicts arise, for me as well as for you. This is an area in which I have very little flexibility. In the case that rescheduling a lesson is necessary, you will be provided with a list of names and numbers of my other students and it will be up to you to exchange times with one of them and let me know of the switch in advance. Missed lessons are made up only in emergency situations. In the event that a lesson swap is not possible, contact me.

PLEASE NOTE: I require 24 hours notice before the cancellation of a lesson.

I will provide a detailed calendar monthly, specifically outlining when your child's lessons will be held. This is the calendar that should be used when swapping times with other students and as a concrete reference for lesson, group/studio class, and recital times. I make monumental efforts to stick to this calendar and reschedule only when absolutely necessary. Please mark these dates on your family calendars as soon as you receive it.

All studio calendars can be found on my website: www.millerviolinstudio.com.

A word about tardiness: If you are late, please do not expect me to extend your lesson into the next student's time.