

Princeton Montessori School

THE SUZUKI METHOD

By Toyoko Kitade

1. Early Start

Musical education begins at birth and formal lessons can start as early as age 3, but it is never too late to begin.

2. Every Child Can Learn

Dr. Suzuki taught that every child can be educated, and tests for “musical talent” are a waste of time because every child has the potential to achieve a high level of musical ability. The most important factor is a commitment to devote time every day to home practice and to listen to the recordings.

3. Parent Involvement

A parent or caretaker learns the basic skills on the child’s instrument as well as the techniques for structuring and leading home practice lessons. Enthusiasm and patience are more important than musical experience.

4. Daily Listening

Each day, children should listen to recordings of pieces they are studying, as well as performances by concert artists, to develop musical sensitivity. With exposure, they learn about music naturally while doing other things.

5. Repetition for Mastery

Students review older pieces they have already learned on a daily basis, to improve their technique and their sensitivity to phrasing and musical feeling. Repetition allows children to polish and hone their skills over time.

6. Individualized Pace of Learning

Students work to master basic skills at their own rate. The initial pace has little to do with the final level of achievement, and tailoring the rate of progress minimizes frustration. Many fine students have started very slowly. Students “learn how to learn” by using a patient and systematic approach to mastering new skills.

7. Positive Approach

Enjoyment is a basic part of the learning process, not something to be added later. The teacher demonstrates constructive ways to praise the child’s success as well as supportive and creative ways to work for further improvement. Parents should continue this positive approach in home lessons, using the skills they are taught.

8. Individual and Group Lessons Each Week

The core of the program is the individual lesson each week. Initially, time is spent teaching the parent the basic skills to play the child’s small instrument, so they can help the child practice at home. Children gradually take over the lesson as their skills and attention span increase. We have never had a parent or child who was unable to learn the basic skills! Many parents enjoy playing so much that they get their own full sized instrument.

In the weekly group class, students learn essential ensemble and performance skills as they practice starting and stopping together, playing in tempo, and also playing solos for each other. They see students playing pieces that they will study later and are motivated to practice more at home. Group games also offer fun and creative ways to practice basic skills.

9. Music Reading

Children learn to speak before they learn to read. Students learn to play with good tone, posture, and musical technique before learning the musical symbols for the sounds that they can produce. Once they develop a good foundational ability to play their instrument, they are taught how to read music and how to play in an ensemble.

10. Accompaniment CD

After careful study of the teaching points of each piece, students practice with the accompaniment CD to improve rhythmic skills, timing, and musical expression. As mentioned above, listening to these CD’s and repeatedly playing along with them are vital components of honing excellent musical sensitivity. Ensemble students also learn their parts quickly by working with special recordings of their part.

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SUZUKI VIOLIN INTRODUCTION & FAQ

By Aaron Torrance

What is the Suzuki Method?

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki was struck by a truly revolutionary idea: *Every child* has the innate capacity to become a talented musician, just as they have a capacity to learn to speak any language spoken in their home. Good training during the critical period of cognitive development is all that is required for *any child* to develop their ability and become an excellent musician.

Dr. Suzuki developed a specific curriculum to help cultivate superior musical ability. He also emphasized certain critical factors to making good progress. Children should begin training as early as possible (though it is never too late to start, it is easier for younger children to gain mastery). Students polish their technique through repetition, regularly reviewing all the pieces they have learned (with a focus on improving their musical expression). They routinely listen to recordings of excellent performances, to develop a good ear. Their practice must also be enjoyable from the start, so instruction is given with constructive praise, and a focus on creative and supportive ways to encourage steady improvement [*a Positive Discipline approach that fits perfectly with the rest of the Montessori philosophy*].

Prior to beginning formal lessons, it is a good idea to routinely expose a child to the music they will be learning. This helps them develop a “good ear” to know how their own playing should sound. Formal instruction begins with a 30-minute individual lesson each week. A parent (or regular caregiver) must attend these lessons, so they can help lead the child in home practice. The home practice is initially quite brief (10 minutes, 5 times per week). As the child’s attention span and ability increase, the length of practice will increase as well.

After learning a few basic skills, all students also attend a 30 minute weekly group lesson. These group lessons aid in developing a variety of performance skills, provide a spirit of camaraderie, and enhance motivation.

Dr. Suzuki was committed to the belief that development of fine musical ability promoted excellent character development. The soul flourishes with deep exploration of the works of great composers. As Dr. Suzuki put it, “If a child is raised on Bach from a young age, the noble soul, the powerful personality, and the religious sensitivity of Bach will develop in the child. If a child is raised on Mozart, then the loving soul of Mozart will develop in the child. The life force in the child will absorb those traits to a high level. The heart that feels music will feel people.” The study of music is an excellent opportunity to broaden and enrich a child’s development.

Can my child do this?

Is my child old enough? What age can lessons start?

The earlier the better! Violin instruction can begin at age 3 (again, though it is never too late to start, it is much easier for younger children to gain mastery). Preparation in the form of regular listening to the Suzuki repertoire (and other classical violin music) is helpful before classes start, and can begin at any time.

[Ms. Kitade (KEY-tuh-day) will gladly meet with you and your child if you are not sure your child is ready.]

My child doesn’t show any sign of musical talent (e.g., no rhythm, doesn’t carry a tune)...

Any child can make great improvement and play beautifully! Musical ability is analogous to language ability. With appropriate training, every child has the ability to learn to read and play music just as fluently as they can speak their native tongue. They have the capacity, they will develop the talent... Really!

I don’t think my child has the concentration span for this...

Studying music actually increases concentration ability! Rest assured, *any child* can learn as long as you help provide a reasonable amount of structure. Please speak with Ms. Kitade about your concerns.

Can I do this?

I understand a parent has to help in home practice... We don't know the first thing about music.

Absolutely no musical background is necessary. You'll learn what you need to know along the way by attending your child's lessons with the instructor. *[I had no musical training, and it has never been a problem]*

We're over-booked as it is, how can we make time for this?

We all have to make time for our priorities. Yes, this is a commitment, but we think the rewards are great. Here's what you can expect:

Children begin with two 30-minute lessons per week. The first is the individual lesson, which you schedule on the day & time that works best for you. The second, the group lesson, is scheduled after school on Thursdays.

The home practice is only about 10 minutes a day initially (make every effort to practice *at least* 5 days per week, preferably at a consistent time). As your child's attention span and ability increase, the length of practice will increase as well. During the second year, lessons may be 20-30 minutes. After three years, kids may practice 40 minutes or more at a time. At this point, students are able to practice independently: as long as you ensure the structure of a time and place to practice, these advanced violinists can practice on their own.

Ms. Kitade and other parents in the program can help you problem-solve, to figure out how to make time in your lives for this valuable experience. Please talk to us if you have concerns.

I have more than one child, if I'm in the lesson with my violinist, who will watch my other child(ren)?

Enrolled siblings of violin students stay in the after-school program at no charge, until the lesson is completed.

Administrative concerns

What if we decide this isn't right for our family? Can we get a refund?

First, please engage in open and honest dialogue with the instructor. By maintaining good communication with Ms. Kitade and letting her know of any difficulties you are having, she can work creatively to help resolve the issue. However, if you ultimately decide that you must withdraw... **Yes**, the school will give a prorated refund covering all the unused lessons.

What if we leave the school? Can we continue?

Yes! Music lessons are open to anyone in the community, and we have taught violin students that never attended Princeton Montessori.

Are the instruments expensive? Can I rent, if I'm not sure we'll continue?

For beginning students, instruments may be rented for less than \$15/month. This money is usually applied toward the purchase of a violin in a "rent to own" model, with the ability to trade up sizes as your child grows. After your child has played for a few years, you will want to own a nicer quality instrument. These range from \$500 to \$1500 for decent student quality instruments (and go up from there). *[The cost is trivial compared to the amount of time you and your child will invest in this activity, and the pleasure and pride that owning a good instrument will bring. Also, fine instruments do not depreciate; they maintain a very high resale value].*

Where should I get a violin or other accessories?

The cheapest rental instruments for beginners are available at the House of Music (2479 Route 31, Pennington; 882-0083). They are open weekdays 4-9 and Saturday 10-5. The cost, with tax, has been \$42.50 per 3 months.

Ms. Kitade may also know of reasonably priced instruments that are available for sale, and has good recommendations for where to purchase a finer instrument when the time is right.

For Suzuki Books & CDs, as well as violin accessories, check prices at swstrings.com or sharmusic.com.

Kids can be pretty careless, what if the violin breaks or gets lost?

Student instruments are generally not lost or stolen. They are also reasonably sturdy: they survive the grand majority of times they are dropped (which is unusual, even for young students). Respect, care, and maintenance of the instrument are taught as part of the lessons. That said, it is an excellent idea to cover any instrument with a rider on your home insurance policy *[this only cost us a few dollars a year above our existing property rider].*

Remind me, what are the benefits?

Work ethic & mastery

The Suzuki philosophy fits perfectly with the Montessori goal of fostering the innate desire for mastery. We believe that it matches, complements, and rounds out the Montessori education.

Suzuki children grow in their capacity and enthusiasm for work. They know that working hard is connected to a clear reward: With practice and effort you can grow your abilities. No difficult task is unobtainable if you can break it down into incremental steps.

Character development

Again, Dr. Suzuki emphasized the degree to which music provided exposure to greatness and that this fostered the development of truly noble character (he said, “It was Mozart who taught me to know perfect love, truth, goodness, and beauty”). Certainly Suzuki students develop discipline, concentration, and enhanced cognitive development. They also develop self-confidence, are free of performance anxiety, and trust in their ability to earn the respect of their peers. This early experience of success and mastery is a predictor of future success.

Quality time

While this program does make demands of your family’s time, the time you spend with kids in practice should be quality time. When approached with a positive attitude, it leads to deeper involvement and connectedness between parent and child.

Pleasure

In the end, music is a source of great joy! You will be giving your child the gift of a deeper ability to appreciate and enjoy music and the arts. And they will have the opportunity to bring joy to others. You can look forward to live music becoming a part of the entertainment at your family events.

Where can I learn more?

Read these books:

Nurtured by Love: The Classic Approach to Talent Education (Shinichi Suzuki). Dr. Suzuki’s life story, describing his philosophy of education and character development. *[a good read, he led a fascinating life!]*

To Learn with Love: A Companion for Suzuki Parents (William & Constance Star). Written by experienced Suzuki parents and educators who helped found Suzuki training in the U.S., this book provides helpful tips for motivating the student (and their parents!).

Contact Ms. Kitade:

Toyoko Kitade (*KEY*-tuh-day) has been teaching Suzuki Violin for well over 25 years. She joined the staff at Princeton Montessori in 2003. Please feel free to ask her any questions: (215) 943-5944; tkitade@pmonsts.org

[Allow me to offer a brief reference for Ms. Kitade. She is a truly gifted and highly motivated teacher, who genuinely loves working with kids. Given her wealth of experience, she has a great ability to come up with creative ways to address any problems a violinist may be having. Whenever I’ve had any concerns about any aspect of my children’s musical education experience (at home or in lessons) I address them openly with her, and she works with me until they are resolved. We are incredibly fortunate to have her on the staff!]

Or, contact me:

My name is Aaron Torrance, and my children, Sophia & Dylan, began attending Princeton Montessori in 2000. They began studying violin when they were ages 3 & 5 [*i.e.*, 1st & 3rd year primary students]. My wife and I had no musical background, and I honestly thought my wife was crazy when she suggested that we sign the kids up for violin lessons... I thought that neither the kids nor any of their ancestors had demonstrated any musical talent. They now play beautifully, and music is a large part of our lives. I am a full believer in the Suzuki Method, and in Ms. Kitade’s unique gift for teaching. This program has enriched the lives of everyone in our family. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions (aaron@torrances.net).