

Peaceful, Productive Practice

by Enid Wood

The Suzuki Method is most successful when it's an integral part of family life.

- 'Practice only on the days you eat.' (This is Dr Suzuki's recipe for success.)
- Listen to your current Suzuki tape every day. Suzuki suggests that listening 50 times daily to the new song may be enough. Listen for twice as long as you practise each day.
- Review your old songs so that neither they nor the techniques in them are forgotten. Spend twice as much time on review as on new pieces.
- Attend group lessons, concerts, workshops, and special events.
- Master each small step thoroughly before going on to the next one. As Suzuki says, "Don't stop. Don't hurry." Remember that the Suzuki Method means each child moves at his own pace. The best players are often the slow starters.
- Repetition is the way that children learn most easily, unless an adult gives them the idea that repetition is dull.
- Tone can be motivating. Pay attention to tone in your practice each day and you'll find that your child will want to practise just so that he can hear those beautiful sounds!
- Relaxed, healthy posture is vital for rapid progress without pain.
- The Parent is the Home Teacher, taking careful notes at lessons so that he or she can help the child at home.

Practice means Progress

- Practicing seven days per week is optimal. Less than five days' practice leads to discouragement.
- Make space in your life for daily practice.
- Whether or not you practise is a non-negotiable issue.
- You can negotiate the content of practice with your child, though you must ensure you accomplish what the teacher has assigned.
- Practise soon after the lesson to remember it well.
- Two short practices are often better than one long one.
- Link practice to an activity that is performed regularly, i.e. do it after breakfast, before watching a set television programme, after cleaning teeth, or upon waking.
- Spontaneous music-making is something that is an effective motivator in addition to regular practice. It must not replace regular practice.
- Technical exercises can be done spontaneously. Put the bow in an accessible place and make impromptu bow holds; practise your vibrato exercises in the car, or on the bus, etc.
- Children like to know and test out their limits. Establish the ground rules for practice, and set clear boundaries for behaviour. Know what you want in advance.
- Expect the best behaviour and playing and you're likely to get it.

A parent's role is not authoritarian. The parent is the child's assistant.

- Ask instead of telling.

- Listen to the child's valid opinions.
- Ask, "Which do you choose to improve? I'm not allowed to remind you!"
- Ask your child, "How could you work on this?"
- Try role reversal. Let the child teach you.
- Practise regularly yourself, so that you and your child may respect each other's efforts.
- The way your child corrects your mistakes may teach you something about how to correct his.
- Have the child notice and value your accurate observation.
- Reward the child for his honest assessment of his own playing.
- Say, "Show me the bow hold (or posture, phrasing, tone, etc) of which you're most proud."
- Remember together the highlights of the last lesson before beginning your practice.
- Decide together which goals to achieve in the practice.
- Set aside some time in each practice for the child to play without interruptions from you.

Use positive language

- Practise saying positive things first.
- Use a friendly tone of voice, with no trace of exasperation in it.
- Eliminate from practice the words 'WRONG', and 'NO' as they'll make your child want to stop trying.
- Pointing out something wrong does not necessarily mean that it will get better. Ask in positive terms for what is right (Not: "You played a wrong note: or "You played a C sharp," but "Please play C natural," or better still, "Would C natural sound better here?")
- Encouragement is often more helpful than praise.
- "Nice try! Please play it again," "This time it will come right," or "You can do it" are all encouraging ways of asking the child to try again without anticipating failure.
- Make a tick in a notebook every time you remember to give positive comments to your child when you are practising. Reward yourself for any improvement in the ratio of positive to negative.

Praise

- Try to find thirty things to praise in your practice. Write them down once and tick when they are right in subsequent practices.
- Praise must be very specific, so that the child learns from it.
- Praise must be honest so that your child learns to trust what you say.
- Beware of praise containing value judgements.
- Don't evaluate your child's playing, just describe it.
- Your child desires your approval, but what is ultimately more important is his own pleasure in his achievements.
- Increase your vocabulary of descriptive words for how the child's playing looks and sounds, i.e. flowing, stoppy, pushy, scratchy, sweet, clear, ringing, hesitant, strong, muddy, etc.
- Increase your vocabulary of superlatives.
- Suzuki says, "Nothing improves hearing more than praise".