

Analysis of Target Selection in Suzuki String Lessons

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In this study I examined teacher and student behavior in 48 violin and cello lessons taught by 12 expert Suzuki string teachers. One representative excerpt of work on a repertoire piece that had been introduced in a preceding lesson was extracted from each lesson videotape and analyzed in detail. Each excerpt was divided into segments (labeled Rehearsal Frames) that encompassed the instructional activities devoted to performance goals (labeled Targets) identified by the teacher. Targets were recorded for each rehearsal frame and categorized according to the teacher's description of the target and according to the aspect of performance to which the target pertained (i.e., tone). Instructional activities within 338 rehearsal frames were examined in terms of the rates, durations, and proportions of time devoted to various aspects of teacher and student behavior, including student performance activities and the content of teacher instructions, modeling, and feedback.

Overall teachers chose to work on intonation, note accuracy and bow distribution more frequently than on any other types of targets. Teachers described targets in terms of musical results (46%) (e.g., tone, style, dynamics) more frequently than in terms of left hand behavior (16%) (e.g., left hand position) or right hand behavior (24%) (e.g., bow direction). Rehearsal frames were characterized by brief and frequent episodes of teacher talk, teacher performance, student performance, and student talk indicating a rapid pace of instruction. The organization of instructional activities in lesson excerpts seemed to result from teachers' reacting to problems encountered in students' performance of the repertoire rather than from a planned sequence of instructional goals.

Analysis of target categories by level of repertoire indicated that in excerpts with repertoire rated as Level I (books 1-3), teachers articulated targets in terms of bow distribution (16), bow direction (11), and bow contact (10) most frequently. Teachers chose to work on right hand behavior targets (42%) to a greater extent than musical results (32%) or left hand behavior (17%) targets. In excerpts with repertoire rated Level II (books 4 and above), teachers articulated targets in terms of intonation (30) and note accuracy (22%) most frequently. A greater percentage of rehearsal frames were devoted to musical results targets (53%) than to right hand behavior targets (16%) or left hand behavior targets (16%).

The results suggest that in studio string lessons, Suzuki teachers focus on improvement of a single aspect of student performance at a time. Following a student performance, teachers issue directives intended to alter specific physical behaviors that affect musical results (e.g., move the bow faster, put more weight on the stick, move first finger closer to the nut), or teachers describe features they want to change in terms of a musical idea (e.g., make a crescendo here, C# needs to be higher) without reference to specific physical behaviors. As the difficulty of the repertoire increases, string teachers tend to describe a greater number of goals in terms of musical results than in terms of the physical behaviors needed to create musical results.

*Nurturing the Talents of Avocational and Adult Amateur String Players:
Implications of Enrichment Teaching and Learning for the Suzuki Community*

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The University of Wisconsin-Madison is home to a large and enthusiastic population of avocational string players: those non-music majors who elect to play as undergraduate and graduate students, and the adult participants in Continuing Education string technique and ensemble courses. This research is based on survey input from this population, and the results have implications for the Suzuki community and the wider string playing community.

Data collected included reasons for beginning or returning to string playing, factors that influenced motivation and continuation (and discontinuation), self-identified technical and musical goals, the availability of string instruction, and perceptions about the importance of life-long learning in strings and in music. The results have the potential to broaden our definitions of talent and talent education, to inform teacher training, to influence the mindsets of Suzuki students and parents, to strengthen communication between school and Suzuki programs, and to bolster advocacy efforts in a wider cultural context.

*How Significant a Role Does Repetition Play in the Practice Sessions
of Artist Teachers and Their Students Who Are Not Suzuki Trained?*

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In the field of music, practice is a subject about which much has been both written and said. Musicians of all ages look to practice as the primary means by which they can attain increasingly higher levels of music proficiency. While individuals' opinions may vary as to how practice should be structured and how repetition should be used in practice sessions, for most musicians, repetition is considered a vital and necessary part of effective practice.

Perhaps nowhere is the importance of repetition in music practice validated as much as in the writings of Shinichi Suzuki, who recommended that one repeat—"Ten thousand times . . . ". An emphasis on practice is an important aspect of both teaching and practicing—for teachers and students who are followers of the Suzuki Method. But what about musicians who are not Suzuki trained? As very little research literature exists on the topic of practice, I was interested in finding out more about how artist teachers and their students use repetition in their practice sessions.

Subjects for this study were 5 artist teachers from the music faculty at The University of Texas at Austin and 3 students from each of their studios. The instruments included in the study were: guitar, piano, trombone, saxophone, and viola. A graduate student, an advanced undergraduate student, and a beginning undergraduate student (each considered highly proficient at practice) from each studio were selected by their teachers to participate in the study.

Each subject's practice was video taped at two different practice sessions. The subjects decided the location of each practice session and were directed to practice as they normally would. After starting the video camera I left each subject to practice alone and returned at an agreed upon time to collect the camera. The only request made of subjects was that they include in their practice session some work on solo repertoire that was at the in between stage of preparation. In other words, the piece was neither in the note learning stages of preparation or being polished just prior to performance. Soon after the conclusion of their second videotape I met with each subject to have them watch a portion of one of their videotapes and to ask them a series of set questions about practice.

Copies of the music practiced were then used to notate graphically how each subject used repetition in their practice. In addition a record was kept of the times (in hours, minutes and seconds) various activities occurred throughout the practice sessions. Consecutive performance trials covering similar musical material were then grouped together into practice frames.

A total of 14 hours and 54 minutes of practice were observed, which included 800 practice frames and 8,527 performance trials. The mean number of performance trials per practice target was 10.7 and the mean duration of individual performance trials was 6.3 seconds. The mean duration of time spent practicing each target passage (i.e. the practice frame) was 1 minute 7 seconds; however, the times spent practicing each target varied widely within and among the various subject groups.

Sharon Miller

Listening, both to the teacher and to recordings in the home, has been a hallmark of the Suzuki Approach to learning music since its inception. Note reading, on the other hand, was not emphasized in Japan because the children learned to read music in school and because there were no orchestras available for young children. Dr. Suzuki stated that students should learn to read music in the middle of Book 4 (Concerto in A minor by Vivaldi) and that printed music was primarily to be used for reference.

Since the introduction of the Suzuki Approach to North America in the 1960's, many educators, while acknowledging the outstanding accomplishments of Suzuki trained violinists, have expressed concern that students would not adequately learn to read because of the high emphasis on listening and the delay of reading. While no studies have revealed that this is the case, concern continues to be expressed in various venues. At the same time, a number of excellent books have been published which guide the Suzuki violin teacher in teaching note reading. In addition the Suzuki Association of the Americas (SAA) showcases an orchestra of young musicians (under age 10) at its biannual convention, demonstrating the abilities of these young musicians.

There is evidence that Suzuki violinists in North America do read music very well. Do these students then continue their aural training through listening? What do SAA Teacher Trainers (those who teach all other Suzuki teachers) practice in their own studios with regard to teaching listening and note reading? How do these practices fit in with the Suzuki philosophy? What trends can be seen in Suzuki teaching in North America? A survey addressing these questions was distributed to ninety SAA Teacher Trainers.

From the thirty-one surveys received, it can be concluded that most Teacher Trainers give specific listening assignments to their students and put much emphasis on teaching listening in sessions with trainees (Suzuki teachers). Nearly sixty percent of respondents begin note reading activities from the onset of lessons or within the teaching of the first two books. This topic also receives much emphasis in Teacher Training courses. Several Trainers stressed that memorization of the material needs to continue after note

reading has commenced. It appears that Trainers strive to balance listening with relatively early note reading.

On the other hand, a number of Trainers continue to follow Dr. Suzuki's guideline of delaying note reading and still produce students who read very well. Some expressed concern that note reading is getting too much emphasis too soon at the expense of listening and, therefore, memorization. Is this the case? It was also noted that some Suzuki teachers themselves do not know the material by memory and use music while teaching and performing. Is there a point at which it can be said that one's teaching practices are (or are not) being true to the Suzuki philosophy?