Part 5:
The Challenges of Offering Group Class

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This is the fifth installment in a series of articles reporting on a large-scale demographic survey of North American Suzuki teachers. The last article in this series examined some of the perceived benefits of group class. In this article, we will review participants’ perceptions of the challenges of group class. Participating teachers were asked to respond to the open-ended question, “What is the greatest challenge of group class?” Their responses were coded and analyzed for important themes.

Approximately 83 percent of the teachers who participated in the survey offer some type of group class. Weekly or bi-weekly group classes are offered most often to beginning students (59 percent of teachers surveyed), with the number of teachers offering group classes decreasing for intermediate and advanced students (44 percent and 38 percent respectively). Only 2 percent of teachers reported not offering group classes at all for beginning students; however, 26 percent reported not offering classes for advanced students.

Teachers described a number of challenges to offering regular group classes that may explain why not all teachers are able to offer these classes on a regular basis. These included:
- Scheduling/student attendance and commitment
- Differentiated instruction/meeting diverse learning needs within a single group
- Lesson planning
- Classroom management/student behavior
- Parental valuing of group classes
- Logistical concerns/finding a suitable physical space

The following quotes illustrate some of the themes that emerged in the participants’ responses. Many address several challenges at the same time.

For one participant, finding a suitable time and place for the group class had proven to be very difficult:

The logistics of it. In a perfect world, I’d have group every week, on a

As someone who did not complete a degree in music education, classroom management/dealing with disruptive behavior is somewhat of a struggle—particularly when the student(s) is from another teacher’s studio.

Teaching theory/reading to an active group after school hours—they are all antsy from a full day of school and sitting on the carpet watching the white board is sometimes tedious.

The following participant quotes address issues of meeting student needs in the group class. Planning engaging activities, particularly for groups which contained wide ranges of ages and/or playing ability, proved challenging for many teachers.

Creating time and energy from teachers to make group class so compelling and fun that this is the primary motivator for

Compared to 20 years ago... families seem to be very busy including so many more activities in their lives and so we see other activities taking students out of the class for several weeks out of the year.

Even teachers who were successful in scheduling well-attended group classes encountered some challenges. Many teachers described feeling unprepared to deal with the unique challenges of group instruction.
perfect attendance, rather than program policy (e.g., disallowing participation in the program due to insufficient attendance). Staying true to the Suzuki philosophy of a range of abilities within the class for modeling and leadership, while addressing educational need for and parent desire for a narrower range within each class.

Book One group class has ages 3-11 roughly. Although the musical level is the same, the developmental levels are different. I want to present activities in an age-appropriate way, but also keep the more mature students engaged and excited.

We have a large cohort of pre-teens who are not progressing as fast. They feel stuck and it leads to behavior problems and retention problems. We are currently looking at ways to engage these students by offering a multi-level group class where students from 10-13 could explore improvising, learn about composers, other art forms, etc.

The challenges described by the respondents can also be represented visually in the diagram on page 6.

The teachers who responded to the survey remained committed to the idea of group class in spite of the challenges. While some of the challenges are difficult for individual teachers to overcome (e.g., over-scheduled students or lack of suitable physical spaces for classes), other challenges such as classroom management, lesson planning, and differentiated instruction could be addressed through focused professional development. The benefits of group class (as described in the previous article) are such that it is certainly worthwhile exploring solutions to some of the challenges so that more students can experience engaging, enriching group music classes.

Free Download! To download a PDF of the Suzuki Yin-Yang Diagram, go to: https://www.uwsp.edu/suzuki/Pages/IRSTE/default.aspx

**Organizational News, continued from p. 4**

**Calendar of Events**

- **September 1**: ASJ Ad contracts due
- **December 1**: Artwork due within
- **March 1, June 1**: 30 days after contract date
- **September 25-25**: SAA Board meeting, Oak Park, IL
- **September 25**: Established Institutes preliminary dates due
- **October 15**: All Institute applications due
- **October 31**: Final date for Premier Membership Renewals
- **December 31**: Final date for 2016 SAA Donations

**2017**

- **January 13-15**: SAA Board Meeting, Location TBD
- **April 21-23**: SAA Board Meeting, Boulder, CO (tentative)
- **May 25-29**: SAA Leadership Retreat, details to come

**Thanks to SAA Staff Members**

Chris Davis, our publications designer for 13 years, has moved on to other artistic endeavors. We miss her, but she remains involved as our newsletter cartoonist and as an enthusiastic Suzuki mom.

Christie Felsing completed a two-year staff position recently. We appreciated her excellent work on Parents as Partners Online and our newsletter Short Score and her support for the Retreat and the Conference. She is now teaching and doing teacher training at the Hartt Community Music School. We wish to thank both Chris and Christie for sharing their talents with the SAA.

The staff has welcomed Cheryl Armstrong as our new publications designer. She comes to us from a career in association publications design in the Denver area. We will soon welcome Margaret Watts Romney, whom many know as a Suzuki Cello teacher in Salt Lake City and a Suzuki alumna. We look forward to adding her to the staff as well.

**ASJ Article Submissions**

We welcome article submissions on Suzuki-related topics. Deadlines are November 1, February 1, May 1 and August 1 for the winter, spring, summer, and fall issues, respectively, but we accept manuscripts year-round. We accept emailed articles, either included in the body of the message or as .doc or .docx attachments and manuscripts on disc by mail. Please do not send articles as PDF attachments. Email manuscripts to editor@suzukiasassociation.org. Please include a short bio and author photo with your submission. Contact publications@suzukiasassociation.org for more information.