

The Importance of Listening



The primary goal of the Suzuki program is to enrich the lives of children through a musical experience. The primary step in this process is for the child to learn to listen. Children need to "hear" the music before they can begin to appreciate or imitate musical sounds. Repetition in listening is extremely important!

Parents can create three types of listening opportunities:

- review listening to the pieces already studied
- listening to the current piece
- advance listening for preparation and motivation for the next piece in the book. In fact, it's valuable to listen several books ahead.

Sometimes, you will provide "**environmental listening**" [or "**passive listening**"] by putting on the recording while getting dressed in the morning, getting ready for bed at night, reading, riding in the car, eating meals, or doing chores.

The other kind of listening, "**active listening**," requires participation while listening, such as, tapping the beat or rhythm, singing the fingerings, singing note or pitch names, or even singing made-up words. Parents need to encourage and participate in active and environmental listening often with their children.

ACTIVE listening counts as practice time. PASSIVE listening does not.

In a recital or concert, children should be taught to have respect for the audience and performers by giving their full and silent attention. The more children are taken to musical events and exposed to the listening discipline--modeled by attentive parents--the better equipped they will become for eventually disciplining themselves to listen.

<http://www.uni.edu/music/suzuki/importance-listening>

Recommended video:

"Listen Like a Maniac" by Michele Horner
<https://vimeo.com/184025782>

Practical ideas for PASSIVE listening

Practical ideas for ACTIVE listening

10 Benefits of Listening to the Suzuki Recordings

1. Their intonation will improve. Playing in tune is so important. No one wants to listen to an out of tune violinist. (Not even the violinist!) When children listen to their Suzuki repertoire, or other high-quality recordings, they become accustomed to hearing good intonation. They will listen to their own playing more intently and adjust to make it match what they are hearing in their mind.

2. Their tone improves. When first learning an instrument, it is good to know what is possible. If children only hear their own tone, which may be scratchy, squeaky, or weak, they may not know the richness of tone that is available to string players. Listening to violinists with beautiful tone opens up the possibility to play with beautiful tone themselves. Again, this improves self-listening and evaluation. Of course, the student will hear their teacher play with good tone, but that's only once a week! If your child heard you speak only once a week, do you think they would learn to talk very quickly or fluently? Probably not.

3. They will learn their pieces more quickly and easily. In the Suzuki method, did you know that teachers are encouraged not to tell their students what the notes to the new pieces are at all? If children are doing lots of listening, they usually can pick out the notes on their own! It's kind of incredible. Even if they aren't doing enough listening to pick out the melody themselves, listening can fill in the blanks so that you don't need to spoon feed every single note of a new song.

4. They will memorize their pieces faster and with more security. Even once students are proficient note readers, listening to the recordings will help with memorization. After listening to a piece several times, the form of the piece becomes clear. You know which sections repeat, and which are different. Massive amounts of listening can prevent those memory slips that are so frustrating in performance.

5. Learning a piece isn't just about learning the notes and bowing on the page! There are many more details to consider. **Dynamics, articulations, tempo changes, all of these things can be heard on the recording and then imitated by the child.** No directions necessary. No need to remind your child about one more thing? Yes, please.

6. One of the most helpful benefits of listening to the Suzuki recordings is that it helps you avoid making mistakes that are difficult to fix. Have you ever learned notes or a rhythm wrong? It is so hard to change those things in your brain and muscle memory. It is so much better to avoid those altogether. If the student is very clear about how things are supposed to sound, they are much less likely to repeatedly make mistakes that become permanent.

7. Listening to upcoming pieces builds anticipation and excitement. If you listen to the repertoire ahead, the student can become acquainted with pieces that they like and are excited to play. These goals can get you through a practicing rut. "Maybe if we work

really hard and practice every day, we can pass off this piece next month and start Humoresque!”

8. Listening is not the only important component of good Suzuki practice, review is also essential. **Listening to review pieces helps students keep them fresh and easily accessible.** If students keep up on their review, not only do they have their newest piece polished and ready to perform at a moments notice, but many others as well. What a confidence boost!

9. Have you ever read a new word in a book but had no idea how to say it? McKenzie, I hope it's ok if I share this story....Oh well, I'm going to share it because it is hilarious. Years ago, Mckenzie (my fellow Suzuki violin teacher and sister) started referring to something she called “Hores Devores.” Do you know what she meant? Yup, hors d'oeuvres. It is the same with music! **If children are listening they become acquainted with advanced techniques like vibrato, trills, spiccato, ricochet, sautillé.** If they have already heard these techniques executed well on their recordings, they are more likely to execute them easily and well themselves.

10. It makes your teacher happy. Your teacher wants your child to be successful. Your teacher wants their students to have a great time, and progress on the instrument. When progress stagnates, motivation and enjoyment diminishes for the student, and that makes your teacher sad.

The Suzuki Method is built on the philosophy that children can learn music just like they learn to speak. Children listen to their parents and others speaking even before birth, and then spend the rest of their childhood listening and imitating everything they hear. If you want your child to learn an instrument the same way, they need to be immersed in that language too. How many hours a day do they hear their native tongue? How often do they listen to their Suzuki repertoire? If you are not seeing the progress you want, it's something to consider!

DR. SUZUKI'S SECRET: LISTEN... CAN YOU HEAR IT?

By Patricia D'Ercole

Find a piece of paper and a pencil and draw a "hefalump " if you can do it you are very smart because to my knowledge there is no such thing. However, if I asked you to draw a chair. you could ask, "What kind would you like'? A folding chair, lawn chair, rocking chair, easy chair. etc." As each of these possibilities was read, probably a mental image came to your mind. Then, depending on your artistic background you could recreate the chair by drawing the lines on the paper to match the image in your mind. If the image on the paper does not look like the one in your mind, in all likelihood you'll erase that line and try again.

Listening works the same way, but we play the tape each day to form the aural image in our mind rather than a visual one. We want the best model to be played over and over again so that we can recall it in our "mind's ear". Then, when we practice, we play that tape in our head and match what comes out of our instrument to our model. When it doesn't match, we stop and correct it. Thus, students who listen, will need less parent and teacher intervention because they will be aware of and thus correct their own mistakes. By contrast, for the student who does not listen prior to learning a piece, their own playing, however correct or incorrect, becomes the tape that is hear in the mind's ear. That is why Dr. Suzuki tells us that our progress is directly proportional to the amount of listening we do.

But there are other reasons as well. First of all, one who focuses on the model in the mind's ear will find it easier to put down the right fingers or keys. That is because subconsciously the brain is sending messages to the fingers thus developing musical intuition.

Secondly, if we listen enough, the tunes continue to play in our mind long after the tape or practice has ceased. The brain is practicing in the subconscious. I know this has happened to me because sometimes barely awake, I suddenly come to the awareness that my brain is humming the piece I was playing the night before. You'll know too that you're listening enough if you and your child are whistling or humming the repertoire while engaged in some other activity.

Thirdly, the ear becomes more sensitized the more it is stimulated. While the beginning student or parent may at first only be able to hear differences in pitch and rhythm, the more advanced student will discriminate differences in dynamics, phrasing, articulation, tone color, etc. For all of these same reasons listening will help parents become better teachers too.

Many of you know Craig Timmerman as a teacher from our American Suzuki Institute. I would like to quote his experience with listening from his book *Journey Down The Kreisler Highway*.

“Last week I found out from a teacher here what is really meant “listening” in Japan. It means hearing the pieces particularly the shorter ones at least 50 times a day! Well, that was a real shock at first. But after more discussion, I found that, by using the audio machines at our disposal, it was easy to fill a whole side of a tape with one or two pieces and then replay the tape several times throughout the day.

By a strange coincidence, days after I learned that, I was able to test the theory for myself. Dr. Suzuki told all the student teachers one day, “Next week we will all play together and study the Bach Corrente.” He mentioned several points to study in particular. Then we listened to Casals play the piece on a tape.

I must admit that I was in somewhat of a state of shock after this, for my ability to memorize is appallingly slow. For me to memorize a piece in only seven days seemed quite impossible. But I went home and made a special tape of the piece. Then I really began to hear it an hour a day. It is surprising that even now long after the piece was memorized, I haven't grown tired of hearing the music.

During the times when I actually listened intently I heard the points that Suzuki had emphasized. Of the many times I heard the piece each day, of course, I really only listened closely to it one or two times. But being in the mood to test this theory, for four days I just played the tape as mentioned. Then for three days I practiced that piece about 20 minutes each day. In seven days I had it memorized! For me that is a feat of unequalled proportions and one that I shall not soon forget. Now, as I practice the piece from memory, I can think of the points that Suzuki talked of. And I get a great deal more out of the piece than would have ever been possible before.”¹

Lastly, listening, any kind, is a very important part of our daily activity. In fact we spend 54.93% of our day doing it. Of the remaining time 23.19% is spent speaking, 13.27% is spent reading, and 8.61% is spent writing.² Interestingly, we have reading, writing, and speaking curriculums in our schools, but not a listening curriculum. Perhaps this is part of the reason why Suzuki students seem to excel in school. They do have a listening curriculum.

Unfortunately, it like practicing or reading needs to be made a priority in our lives and if it is, what success awaits us!

¹Craig Timmerman, *Journey Down The Kreisler Highway*. (Memphis TN, Ivory Palaces Music Publishing Co. 1987) p 30-31

²Chris Brewer and Don Campbell. *Rhythms of Learning*, (Tucson, AZ, Zepher Press 1991) p. 19
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