

Dispelling a Myth about Suzuki Early Childhood Education

By Christine Goodner | SuzukiTriangle.com

Suzuki Early Childhood Education (SECE) is a big passion of mine. I am always excited to talk to other teachers and new parents about why I love it so much.

My background is in Early Childhood Education and I consider teaching young students my specialty. I have taught in other ECE music programs before and there are lots of great things about them. I don't have anything negative to say about them and I think that having a young child in any Early Childhood Music class is a wonderful thing.

However, I think there is an idea out there that Suzuki ECE classes are the same as all those other classes and that there is no reason to teach it over any other program. Having experience teaching both, I have to say from the teacher's perspective this couldn't be further from the truth. When I first watched a Suzuki ECE class I was so excited to see what was happening (and how different it was) that I knew someday this was something I needed to do.

I noticed that the parts of teaching other ECE music classes that I found frustrating or counter-productive (like the chaotic environment that I felt didn't prepare students well for the environment of music lessons) were not happening in this class – and that everything flowed in such a natural way. I just had to find out more about it.

Now that I have taken training and started teaching SECE classes I have been thinking about how to explain what it is that makes SECE so unique. Here are five things that stand out to me that set it apart from other programs:

1. Mastery : Unlike other programs where the music (both in class & listened to at home) rotates often: in SECE we always rotate between 2 set weeks of curriculum. The repertoire we use is built upon in layers and made more advanced for the students as they master it (much like instrumental playing and review pieces) but we keep coming back to the same curriculum we know in order to build mastery.

Children's brains are wired to learn by repetition like this and we certainly want parents to understand the power of repetition & review and the impact it has on their child. In this class they can really see this in action. Mastery of the curriculum allows children the freedom to know the music inside and out & to be able to focus on other things like adding dynamics and musical timing and the many other concepts that are a part of class. I think it beautifully prepares everyone for the mastery we focus on through review in the Suzuki Method.

2. Character Development as a Goal of the Class: "Character First , then Ability" was a focus of Dr. Suzuki and that is also a focus of this class which is certainly unique. Waiting to take turns, sharing with each other by rolling the ball to a friend in class, and helping put instruments away with care are some of the examples of how we do this.

We hear stories about toddlers who go home and very gently pet the family dog and sing “Bow Wow Wow” to it (rather chasing it around like toddlers tend to do) and see very young children who learn to patiently wait their turn because they know a turn *is* coming their way. Developing wonderful human beings, not just wonderful musicians, is at the heart of the Suzuki method and this class does it like no other Early Childhood Class I have seen.

3. Suzuki Parent Education: Since I started a good parent education system in my studio it has made a world of difference in how successful new families are and it has made my job as the teacher so much easier. This is even more true if a family comes to the studio from the Suzuki Early Childhood Class because so many parts of being a Suzuki parent are emphasized during the class as a natural part of attending.

Parents journal at the end of class and learn to notice tiny increments of progress that their child is making. They learn to ask questions and get encouragement and feedback from the teachers through these journals.

Parents learn to observe their children closely, how their child might approach learning new things, and that they are a critical piece of their child’s success.

4. The Power of at Home Listening: During SECE classes parents also see the impact of listening to the recording at home and how it affects the way their child participates in class and learns the music from class. The impact of repetition, to gain confidence and mastery over skills from the class, leaves a lasting impression about the power of review.

Some parts of the Suzuki method that are the most unique and need the most explaining when we start lessons are just a given and taken for granted when students start in an SECE class first. Teacher trainer Sharon Jones calls it a “3 year parent education program.”

5. Focus & Calm: There is a striking difference in the feeling of class between SECE classes and other types of Early Childhood Music programs that I have seen and worked in. SECE classes have a feeling of focus and calm. Parents of older children who have been in other programs tell us they notice it too. While there are times in class to be expressive and dance all around the room, most of the class is very focused in nature.

When children are calm they can learn more easily and from the start of class with the ball rolling, to the smooth changes between songs, the environment is one that promotes learning for each child. This is also a huge factor in helping students prepare for private instrument study. If students come into my studio having experienced and developed this focus and calm then we are ready to start making progress right away!

I hope this article helps clear up the myth that Suzuki ECE classes are just like all other music classes for children out there. In my experience it the best way to prepare students to move easily into instrumental lessons and to prepare parents for what the Suzuki method will require of them as well.

You can read more of Christine’s writing on www.SuzukiTriangle.com & pick up her book *Beyond the Music Lesson: Habits of Successful Suzuki Families* on Amazon & BookDepository.com (for free international shipping).