

TEACH SUZUKI

A resource for teachers and parents with a focus on the Suzuki Method.

"To teach is to learn twice."

Joseph Joubert, French moralist

<http://teachsuzuki.blogspot.it/>

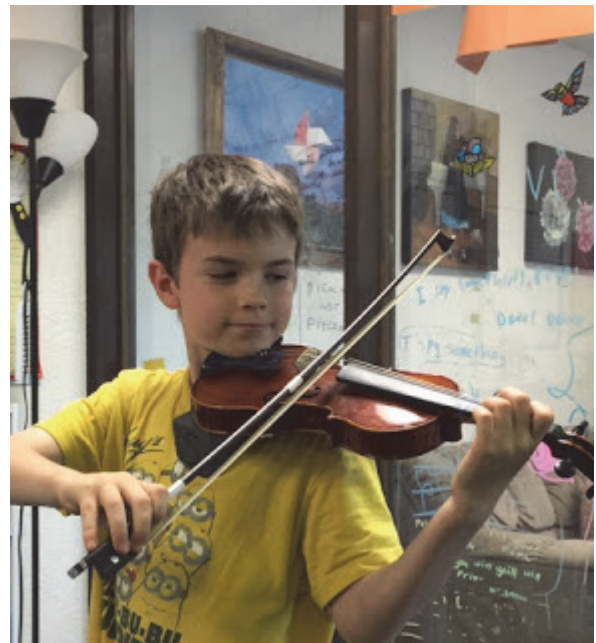
Paula E. Bird

The Importance of Music Education

In a recent podcast episode ([episode 52: Why Study Music?](#)), I discussed eight abilities that the study of music will develop. Let me list those eight abilities here:

- Ability to Listen
- Ability to Observe and Imitate
- Ability to Memorize
- Ability to Concentrate
- Ability to Perform
- Ability to be Disciplined
- Ability to Persevere
- Abilities of the Heart

My purpose in bringing up this discussion of the importance of music education is to remind us of Dr. Suzuki's greater mission. He did not merely teach the violin; his greater purpose was to teach the child to be a fine human being with a noble heart. He chose to do that through the study of the violin.



Music Teaches Eight Abilities

My purpose in bringing up this discussion of the importance of music education is to remind us of Dr. Suzuki's greater mission. He did not merely teach the violin; his greater purpose was to teach the child to be a fine human being with a noble heart. He chose to do that through the study of the violin.

The episode takes a closer look at each of these abilities and why learning them is important for children (and adults). I like to think of these abilities as life skills to be applied in other areas of life. Not only do I believe that children should be taught these life skills, but I think that adults should improve these skill abilities (or learn them) as well. So let us look more closely at each of these eight abilities.

The first ability is the ability to listen. In the Suzuki program, children listen to the songs that they will learn. These children develop a very high level of listening ability and can figure out fingerings and bowings to songs that they have not yet learned except through hearing the songs. This ability to listen to such a high degree will carry over into other important areas of life, such as school, work, or ultimately in a loving relationship with another.

TEACH SUZUKI

A resource for teachers and parents with a focus on the Suzuki Method.

"To teach is to learn twice."

Joseph Joubert, French moralist

<http://teachsuzuki.blogspot.it/>

As these children continue lessons into the more advanced books of repertoire, they will also learn how to listen very carefully to their performance. This is a much more **complex level** of focused listening that expands a child's ability to hear, listen, and evaluate. If students are not naturally aural learners, they can still develop the ability to listen to a very high degree.

Children also develop the ability to observe and imitate. Dr. Suzuki observed that children already use this ability when they learn to speak their native language. We were blessed with eyes and ears -- two of each -- and that is the best way we have to learn anything. I can make my teaching points clear to my students and their parents when I pick up my instrument and demonstrate the point.

The author John Holt wrote, "How Children Learn" ([affiliate link](#)). He describes how a young child learns by imitating: a very young child may attempt to imitate what they see someone else do, and then will stop and watch again to see whether their attempt at imitating measures up to what they saw. They watch, try it out, then watch to see how close they came, make adjustments, try it out again, then watch to see how close they came, make more adjustments, and so forth. In other words, the little ones learned how to do something by watching, imitating, and then trying it out.

An older child, in contrast, would watch, but the imitation might happen a few times in the older child's mind or imagination first until the older child felt more comfortable and confident that the older child would be able to successfully recreate what the child observed. The podcast episode discusses even more points related to a child's imitation and learning, including the instinct of workmanship ([listen](#)).

Another ability developed through the study of music is the ability to memorize. In the Suzuki program, students memorize at first through listening to the pieces they are studying and in the same way that the students learned their native language through hearing and absorbing the language in the environment. In the Suzuki world, students hear the songs that they are studying because parents have the music playing in the home, and the students are constantly exposed to the sounds that the students will be making on the instrument. Later when students learn how to read the language of music, students will learn how to memorize using the sense of sight as well.

The ability to concentrate is a fourth ability developed in music study. I have published a book about the steps that lead to the Twinkle Variations for violin ([The Twinkle Project](#)), and I spend a great deal of the early book talking about how to develop concentration and focus in young children and beginning students. This skill development is not just limited to little children though; I spend a great deal of time working on this ability with my older university and adult students as well. It is important that we learn how to focus and concentrate at any stage of our development and life, because without focus and concentration, we do poor or shoddy work. We lose track of important details. We practice

TEACH SUZUKI

A resource for teachers and parents with a focus on the Suzuki Method.

"To teach is to learn twice."

Joseph Joubert, French moralist

<http://teachsuzuki.blogspot.it/>

poorly, meaning that we learn how to do things inefficiently, with poor quality, and we are not fully engaged in what we are doing.

I remember standing in a line to get on an amusement park ride when I overheard two mothers talking about their 9 and 10 year old boys. The one mother said that she wanted to put her boy in trumpet lessons, but her boy did not concentrate very well. This mother thought that waiting awhile would be the solution. As any Suzuki music teacher would know, waiting will not fix the concentration and focus problem. The only way to learn how to concentrate and focus is to practice doing so. This is a regular part of lessons in my studio, and I ask that the parents of my students spend adequate time on this area as well at home.

The fifth ability is the ability to perform. This ability will apply to all areas of a student's life. By learning how to perform, students learn how to present themselves and their ideas and work product to share with others. Music has the unique distinction as well of helping us to learn how to make connections with others. Music does not merely entertain by performing for spectators, as occurs in sports. Music adds that other dimension of establishing a communication and a connection with the listener. Since music is energy expressed mostly through sound but also through sight and feeling, it touches listeners on a physical level that sometimes listeners are not even aware is happening. Whenever I do leadership and energy development skill exercises in my group classes, there may be a few students and parents who will be surprised to discover how much connection there can be during a performance. And I mean this in a good way.

There are many performances that may be wonderful but that do not touch us to the core. Recently one of my high school advanced students attended a symphony concert where the performer played a concerto that my student was currently studying. At first my student loved the performance and raved about the many things that he heard during the concert. When I saw my student at his next lesson, he had some additional observations to make, such as that he did not feel that connection that we talk about. The performance was indeed great, but it was not that soul-touching, mind blowing experience that we will remember forever.

The ability to perform teaches us how to develop self confidence, how to present ourselves in a way that provides us with a sense of inner strength as well as projects that core strength to our audience. And performing also applies to other subjects and areas as well, from sports events and school presentations, to formal situations such as workplace demonstrations. Even being the new kid in the school will involve performance of some kind on the part of all students.

At the university, my violin studio holds a weekly seminar class where we meet to discuss pedagogy and technique development. We also perform for each other. My students learn the crucial performance skills, such as the importance of posture and how one walks onto a stage or into a room and the kind of effect this will have on the audience as well as the

TEACH SUZUKI

A resource for teachers and parents with a focus on the Suzuki Method.

"To teach is to learn twice."

Joseph Joubert, French moralist

<http://teachsuzuki.blogspot.it/>

performer. We talk about our presentation physically as well as how to use our energy in the creation of the musical performance, and I know that these discussions about performance carry over into other areas of my students' lives. This is a really, really important skill that is developed by music study.

The **ability to be disciplined** is one of the most important skills developed through the study of music. Music teaches students how to develop discipline in their personal habits as well as professional ones. Students learn how to practice correctly, how to maintain regular practice routines, how to prepare presentations, how to analyze things and go through a sequence of steps in order to learn and master a new piece of music, a new skill, or a refinement of an old piece or skill.

We learn how to be disciplined to some degree, usually with something that we like to do. Then we might move on to another activity and work on the discipline ability with the new activity. I find that following a marathon training program has quite nicely dovetailed with my ability to be disciplined about my music practices as well. I learned at a very young age how to be disciplined in my music, and I find that this ability has carried forward into many activities, from writing legal briefs that were 50 pages in length to running a 50K. Both of these activities took the same concentration, focus, and discipline that my music practices demanded from me.

The **ability to persevere** is the ability that will carry us through tough situations and keep us from giving up when things become hard. Life may be full of tragic, heart-wrenching, and mind-blowing events that will be difficult to overcome. Yet, many people do. The ability to persevere helps to give people the ability to work through tough times.

The study of music teaches us how to develop that skill. We encounter stumbling blocks pretty much all the time. But for the love of the music, the fun of doing what we are doing, that fact that our parents seem to want us to do this and enjoy the activity and encourage us, and the fact that children generally want to please their parents, parents can really teach a child this important ability. With a little humor, lots of patience and kindness, and a generous dose of good will and encouragement, parents can help children work through any frustration or difficulty and come out the other side with a smile and a sense of pride that the child accomplished something. Dr. Suzuki said, "Teaching intonation and technique will never be more than a method. We do not have to become professional musicians. It is enough to grow up playing the violin. Because a person works at playing the violin well he develops ability to overcome any difficult problems by working. Then he accomplishes the ability to overcome even the hardest problems easily."

And finally, the last ability of music education that I want to discuss is what Jeanne Luedke calls the **abilities of the heart**. Consider the possibilities of this quote from Dr. Suzuki: "Music exists for the purpose of growing an admirable heart. A child raised on Bach from a young age will develop the noble soul, powerful personality and the religious sensitivity of Bach.

TEACH SUZUKI

A resource for teachers and parents with a focus on the Suzuki Method.

"To teach is to learn twice."

Joseph Joubert, French moralist

<http://teachsuzuki.blogspot.it/>

The force that makes a child want to live and survive will absorb the traits of Bach's music to a high degree."

Even young children can play a musical instrument and create a musical mood that will touch the heart of a listener. Music has that power, and even the youngest of children can learn how to express that power and share it with others, even very young children.

I tell my new studio parents that when children study music and how to play a musical instrument that these children will be exposed to the best of music that our culture has to offer. Music has been around since the beginning of recorded time, and what has survived over the centuries in this body of musical works is the best of these works. The child will absorb so many things while studying this music and how to play. The child will not only absorb the sounds of music, but also the expression of feelings and events and emotions and even the description of beautiful things in nature, including possibly the recreation of story within the musical notes – all of this will be absorbed by the child who is exposed to and studies this music and combination of sounds.

The child's parents and other family members will also absorb this same fabulous collection of the best of our culture. We also learn how to appreciate and study new ideas and sounds, including new music and music from different cultures besides the Western culture. Music gives our young students and children the tools necessary to learn about, connect with, and appreciate the creations of other cultures besides our own.

At some point in their music studies, my students ask me what book I'm in. I always answer the same way. I am in book 11. And this book is the hugest book of all the Suzuki books, because it is everything else that is not yet in books 1-10. This book has thousands of pieces in it.

The gift of the abilities of the heart is my favorite gift from the study of music, because I think that this was Dr. Suzuki's most important mission in his teaching. Let us recommit to this mission in all that we do with our children and students.

To hear more about these eight abilities, visit the podcast: [episode 52: Why Study Music?](#)

To learn more about my book, *The Twinkle Project*, visit: [my shop](#).

Happy Practicing!

----- *Paula* -----

© 2017 by Paula E. Bird