

Developing Independence and Ownership from a Teacher's perspective

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Parents' involvement is critical in the Suzuki approach. We all know this and we have heard it probably 10,000 times. However, there are certain things we take for granted and it is healthy to check from time to time, if those premises are still valid or not. Parents' involvement is definitely one to check regularly given the changes within society in the past 10 to 15 years.

Dr. Suzuki's discoveries about how children learn can be seen as a puzzle and only if all parts of this puzzle are in the right place, can we see the whole picture. If only some parts of the puzzle are connected we may get an idea how the picture will look like in the end, but it remains an incomplete work. Most of us have done puzzles and most of us start by looking for the four corners first.

In Dr. Suzuki's pedagogy the approach is the same. One of the corners of the 'Suzuki puzzle' is the 'parents' involvement' and the opposite corner is probably 'independence'. In order to complete the picture we need both of those corners and all the pieces in-between.

The parents' involvement starts with an inquiry or call when their child would like to learn an instrument (it is not the child who calls us!) It is the parents who need to understand what to practice and how often, not the child. It is the parents who have to play the recording for the child, not the other way around. It is the parents who drive the child to the lesson and it is the parents who take notes.

To create a desire in music remains the essence of our teaching philosophy and to create a desire for quality, not for quantity. What a joy it is for us teachers when we can show our students the way to improve their skills and refine their sound and interpretation. What a joy it is for students if they internalise those concepts and ideas on how to improve and discover their own way to practice.

The independence of children is based on the trust we have in them. It all starts with small steps (e.g. going alone to a friend in the neighbourhood). If this has worked out successfully, the steps get bigger (e.g. coming home alone after school or staying overnight at a friend's place). The same is true in teaching. We start assigning the student to revise some pieces on their own before or after the parent practice (e.g. the new piece or the new exercise). Once a child is able to do this, we add to the tasks until a child can practice completely independently. The time this takes can vary from one week to one year! It totally depends on the child, his age and his environment.

Ownership is based on independence and independence is based on trust. These are the ingredients we need to enable students not play for us or for their parents but to play for themselves so that playing an instrument becomes a need for them, the instrument becomes part of their bodies, music a part of their soul and continuous learning and searching for quality a part of their existence.