

Review

One of the most important, and least understood, aspects of the Suzuki Method is review.

The Suzuki Method is based on the mother tongue approach to learning. A child does not discard the first words learned but continues to use them over and over as new words are added to the vocabulary. Suzuki students keep the original pieces learned in their repertoire, reviewing them daily to perfect those skills, which are then used again and again in the subsequent pieces. As children learn to speak, they retain the first words spoken, continually refine them and keep them in their vocabulary as they continue to learn new words. Constant repetition of the first words improves the child's ability to pronounce them and use them in a variety of contexts. In the Suzuki Method, the first pieces are kept in the repertoire, constantly refined and brought to a new level. As the pieces are refined, new techniques and musical skills are applied.

Suzuki students are expected to retain and review every piece of music ever learned on a regular basis, in order to raise technical and musical ability. Review pieces, along with "preview" parts of music a student is yet to learn, are often used in creative ways to take the place of the more traditional etude books. Traditional etudes and technical studies are not used in the Suzuki method, which focuses almost exclusively on a set of performance pieces.

As children progress through the literature, they are expected to play their "old" pieces with their new skills. A child who has learned vibrato, for example, will review the pieces in early book one incorporating the vibrato in the performance. Also, about 80% of the skills needed for every new piece are contained in previous pieces. Reviewing these skills make it easier for the student to learn the new repertoire. New skills needed for the new pieces can be introduced in familiar tunes. (Using 4th finger instead of open strings, shifting, refined bowings or other articulations).

Review builds a repertoire. Suzuki students should never be at loss for what to play.

Dr. Suzuki always said that he can tell what book a student is currently in by listening to their Twinkles. The student who is reviewing consistently is applying his new skills to the previous repertoire.

This is what Dr. Suzuki wrote to students who had submitted graduation tapes for him to hear:

" I enjoyed hearing you play. I am very happy that you are practicing hard and you can play so well. Study well every day. The importance is still to review daily. Please always play your old pieces over and over again with the recordings. Doing this increases abilities. As your ability grows, your next pieces will be completed more and more easily. So review is very important for fast progress.

In Suzuki Method repeating old things daily and playing with the recording are most important. You can play them well so it is fun, isn't it? When you finish then practice your new piece. Please divide your daily practice into two parts like that. OK? If you do that you will be able to easily learn your new piece very soon and quickly progress. This is Suzuki Method, would you do that for me?

There are 3 stages of learning. In the first stage, the student learns the notes and new techniques in the piece. In the second stage, he develops fluency, ease and consistency. In the third stage, the student can concentrate polishing the piece, refining phrasing, dynamics, tone and artistry.

Review develops mastery and fluency. It allows the student to maintain an active repertoire. It increases the child's confidence and self esteem, and it provides awareness of progress and artistic development.

In my teaching, I always feel that the students make real progress as they review and polish the old repertoire. Yes, it is necessary for them to learn new pieces, but this is just the first stage of learning. The real progress comes as the student takes the familiar repertoire to a new level.

There are two types of review: general review which keeps the pieces current, and specific review which focuses on certain pieces to implement new skills.

Book 1 students should play every piece every day. As they progress into later books, the review often has to be divided. Students could review all the pieces in a given key, all the pieces that are legato, staccato, start on a specific note, begin V bow, have repeats, etc. You can mark the pieces in the index as A-B-C-D and the student reviews all of the A pieces on a given day, the B pieces the next day, and so on. Students also will be reviewing their repertoire in group classes. Home concerts, book graduations and recordings for Grandma are also good opportunities to encourage review.

It is important to hear some review pieces at every lesson, and review should be a part of every home practice.

Gilda Barston