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2016

International Research Symposium on Talent Education, Part 4: The joys and benefits of Suzuki gr...

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Version	
Citation (published version):	Guerriero, E. M., Mitchell, N., Einarson, K. M., Hendricks, K. S., & D'Ercole, P. D. (2016, Spring). International Research Symposium on Talent Education, Part 4: The joys and benefits of Suzuki group class. American Suzuki Journal, 44(3), 8.

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/26747>*Boston University*

The Joys and Benefits of Suzuki Group Class

Citation:

Guerriero, E. M., Mitchell, N., Einarson, K. M., Hendricks, K. S., & D'Ercole, P. D. (2016, Spring). International Research Symposium on Talent Education, Part 4: The joys and benefits of Suzuki group class. *American Suzuki Journal*, 44(3), 8.

This is the fourth article in a series reporting the findings of a large-scale demographic study of Suzuki teachers in Canada and the United States. Previous articles introduced the research, reporting on basic demographic statistics, teacher training, studio size, and structure of group classes. In this article we report on the results of an open-ended response question regarding the benefits of student participation in Suzuki group class.

In addition to answering multiple choice questions discussed in previous articles, the 1128 participants in the study were asked to answer the following question: "What is the greatest benefit of group class?" The participants were asked to write as much or as little as they needed to answer the question. We then coded and analyzed their responses, looking for meaningful trends. Five main themes were identified:

1. Community-building and social benefits (e.g., cooperation)
2. Greater personal musical or artistic development (e.g., mastering repertoire)
3. Motivational and/or fun for students
4. Building development of artistic traits (e.g., ensemble playing)
5. Building development of personal traits (e.g., confidence)

While the question initially asked "What is the greatest benefit of group class?" many participants also stated that it was hard to choose just one benefit for students participating in Suzuki group instruction. The following are some selected participant statements regarding the emergent themes.

Regarding community-building and social benefits, one teacher-participant wrote:

*"Wow--way too many awesome benefits to name just one! ... **social contact** which aids in student retention, opportunity to teach topics such as theory and reading efficiently, development of **ensemble skills** leading to high-level advanced ensembles, modeling of skills among students, opportunity to play for **community** groups" and another teacher wrote, "The **camaraderie** built between students and between parents. They reinforce what is worked on in private lessons, polishing of ensemble skills, work on bowings and intonation, reinforce technique work and **interact** provide an opportunity to work with other string players."*

Regarding musical and artistic development, one teacher-participant wrote:

“To be a part of a whole which exceeds the sum of the parts. One young boy after his first group told his mother, I felt like I was playing in an orchestra! The adults, too, express delight to be playing in parts.”

Another teacher-participant remarked on the cohesiveness of the lesson experience:

*“The sense of **community** it engenders among students and parents. Additionally, the fluent musical flexibility it develops. Skills such as learning to **listen** well, to **lead**, to **follow**, to **accompany**, to **watch**, and to create a sense of **cohesion** is a powerful experience.”*

Regarding the development of personal and motivational traits, one participant reported on the cooperation enjoyed in a bilingual Suzuki community:

*“The fact that parents can feed off of each other. In my teaching situation, the parents primarily speak Spanish, so where there are instructions or ideas that I cannot convey to the fullest extent, the parents are always able to **translate** and **work together** to get the message across. It is super helpful and they love helping one another.”*

Another teacher described the motivational interactions and expansion of skills:

*“I feel it teaches a totally different skill set [than] the private lesson. You are able to touch on things you would never have time for in just the one on one. The **friendships** made also help to motivate the children.”*

Indeed, there are many benefits of group class! As researchers, we were able to take the coded themes and develop the following diagram, representing the words and ideas that were used most frequently. The larger the words, the more often they showed up in participant responses.

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In summary, Suzuki teachers reported many various benefits to Suzuki students participating in group instruction: socially, musically, and personally. One final quote sums up the overall benefits that teachers shared:

*“**Musical acuity**--formed by not only receiving instruction, but sharing, discussing and **listening** to others. Personal **enlightenment**, maturity and insight--dealing with differences, respecting opinions, creating **cohesion** in a group to create something more than the individual.”*

*Free Download! To download a PDF of the Suzuki Hand Diagram, go to:
<https://www.uwsp.edu/suzuki/Pages/IRSTE/default.aspx>

