

Liberty University

School of Music

**The Benefits of the Suzuki Method**  
**For Children's Cognitive and Physical Development:**  
**A Descriptive Phenomenological Study of Suzuki Specialists**

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of the School of Music  
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Doctor of Music Education

by

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## ABSTRACT

This descriptive phenomenological study aimed to explore the experiences and perceptions of Suzuki specialists regarding the cognitive and physical development of children participating in the Suzuki method of music instruction. Music educators recognize the Suzuki method as a successful approach for delivering content and meeting music students' needs. This study may provide a roadmap for conducting the Suzuki method with young students aged five to twelve. The lived experiences of Suzuki teachers provided a unique perspective for understanding how Suzuki instruction contributes to children's physical and cognitive development. This study explored the following central research question: How do Suzuki specialists describe their teaching experiences? The research sub-questions concerned how Suzuki specialists described their experiences teaching elements related to physical and cognitive development. Data were collected through focus group interviews, and epoché and horizontalization were employed for the data collection and analysis. Music teachers could enhance children's cognitive and physical development by considering and applying this study's findings, which provide practical information describing how Suzuki specialists used the method to enhance children's development. This research on Suzuki specialists' lived experiences identified five distinct themes: 1) parental involvement, 2) encouragement with a positive mindset, 3) play by ear, 4) group play, and 5) fine muscle development. The findings may also contribute to the literature that describes the theories and practices involved in the effective teaching and learning of instrumental music.

*Keywords:* Suzuki method, cognitive development, physical development, music education, children

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Examining the lived experiences of Suzuki teachers provides a critical perspective for understanding how Suzuki instruction contributes to children's cognitive development (CD) and physical development (PD). This study investigated the hidden benefits of Suzuki specialists' teaching and knowledge. Applying its findings may assist future studies on the Suzuki method and help inform music teachers of best practices in Suzuki instruction.

To consider the relationship between the Suzuki method's use and children's PD, it was first essential to explore its underlying philosophy. The balance of the body is one potential benefit, while another crucial goal of the Suzuki method and other related methods of instruction is performance posture. This research offers practical information to better understand how the Suzuki method may enhance children's PD.

Shinichi Suzuki's instruction enhances CD through memory retrieval. Thus, students involved in Suzuki instruction may experience improvements in areas of CD along with other educational benefits.<sup>1</sup> Applying the Suzuki method may also benefit children's creativity, mental stability, and social skills. Therefore, this research explored the lived experiences of Suzuki specialists to understand possible relationships between participating in Suzuki instruction and children's CD.

### **Background**

Research has demonstrated that music education contributes to children's CD and physical health. For example, the number of children diagnosed with autism globally has

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Bugos and Jennifer Mazuc, "Semantic Clustering and Processing Speed in Suzuki Violinists," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* No. 198 (2013): 7.

increased by 178% since 2000.<sup>2</sup> According to music therapist and researcher Michael Thaut, children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often have remarkable musical capabilities and responsiveness to music compared with other areas of behavior and children without ASD.<sup>3</sup> Considering the lived experiences reported by Suzuki specialists may help the parents of children with ASD to understand the relationships between music education and ASD. Furthermore, exploring Suzuki specialists' lived experiences may provide insights that could help teachers assist students with mental and physical disabilities.<sup>4</sup> Since music education provides cognitive and physical benefits, Suzuki activities may enhance the growth and health of young students in modern society.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Jennifer Bugos and Jennifer Mazuc indicated that Suzuki-based instruction could improve children's verbal, memorization, and musical abilities beyond traditional music instruction.<sup>6</sup> Combining this understanding with data acquired through an exploration of the lived experiences of Suzuki specialists may provide practical information to help teachers enhance the growth and development of children involved in Suzuki instruction. Furthermore, reporting the life experiences of Suzuki specialists revealed through interviews and focus groups may provide information that would assist in developing practical solutions for enhancing the application and practice of the Suzuki method.

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<sup>2</sup> The Autism Community in Action, "Autism rate," retrieved May 17, 2022, <https://tacanow.org/autism-statistics/>.

<sup>3</sup> Ryan Hourigan and Amy Hourigan, "Teaching Music to Children with Autism: Understandings and Perspectives," *Music Educators Journal* Vol. 96, No. 1, (September 2009): 41.

<sup>4</sup> Shinichi Suzuki, Kyoko Selden and Lili Selden, *Nurtured by Love* (Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Publishing Company, Inc, 2013), 91.

<sup>5</sup> Suzuki, Selden, and Selden, *Nurtured*, 91.

<sup>6</sup> Bugos, "Semantic Clustering," 15.

### **Problem Statement**

Many studies have emphasized the Suzuki method's benefits. However, few studies and resources have used the teaching experiences reported by Suzuki specialists to describe children's CD and PD. The researchers who have explored the Suzuki method have based their discussion on an outside view, with remarkably little research offering practical information from the perspective of experienced Suzuki specialists. The teaching experiences of Suzuki specialists may guide music educators and parents in understanding the objective view of the Suzuki method.

In addition, many relevant studies have addressed the history of the Suzuki method. Some have also focused on academic music education and information about the Suzuki method. However, those works have not explored or exposed Suzuki specialists' experiences. They have also neglected to highlight the Suzuki method's benefits and the practical ways Suzuki specialists utilize it. As a result, the literature still needs to describe Suzuki specialists' informal observations and teaching experiences. In addition, the literature has not clearly identified how the Suzuki method enhances children's CD and PD.

### **Purpose Statement**

This descriptive phenomenological study aimed to explore Suzuki specialists' experiences and perceptions concerning the CD and PD of children participating in Suzuki instruction. After interviewing experienced Suzuki specialists involved in Suzuki associations in the United States, the researcher analyzed qualitative data to identify themes related to teaching experiences. The researcher also explored data from focus groups and primary source documents. Additionally, epoché and horizontalization were applied, which helped to guide data collection and interpretation and foster an understanding based on valid and unbiased research.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study may inform music teachers, music researchers, and other music-related field workers of the educational benefits of the Suzuki method based on Suzuki experts' experiences. This could influence the future development of Suzuki music education for young children. In addition, this study could inform music educators and researchers about the practical use of the Suzuki method. Furthermore, reporting Suzuki specialists' experiences, as revealed through research interviews, could help to support, and improve current music education practices.

Moreover, this study could provide practical information about how Suzuki specialists address issues related to their commitment to students' CD and PD in various teaching situations. The findings of this study may also provide parents, educators, and counselors with information regarding the teaching experiences that indirectly accompany the Suzuki method. Furthermore, experienced Suzuki teachers could explain how they apply the Suzuki method in various situations with diverse student backgrounds, needs, and preferences. Since Suzuki specialists' field experiences were the present study's focus, educators and researchers may reflect upon and apply knowledge of these experiences to assist students through the Suzuki method's practical adaptation and use.

### **Research Questions**

The research design of this study was based on the following central research question(RQ) and two research sub-questions (SQs).

**Central RQ:** How do Suzuki specialists describe their lived teaching experiences?

**SQ1.** How do Suzuki specialists describe their experiences of teaching elements related to physical development (PD)?

**SQ2.** How do Suzuki specialists describe their experiences of teaching elements related to cognitive development (CD)?

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### Descriptive Phenomenological Research

This research study project was rooted in the descriptive phenomenological research model. Through participants' vivid depictions of their experiences, phenomenological researchers construct a meaningful reality through data analysis.<sup>7</sup> Phenomenological researchers pause and examine a phenomenon as the lived experience of a particular activity and then illuminate its specific character as an experience instead of attempting to turn it into an abstract structure and compare it with other formats. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) developed the concept of epoché to focus on the analysis of lived experience without bias. Epoché was critical to the present study. Husserl's phenomenology suggested that people gain more precise knowledge by focusing on their thinking. This process moves from naming experiences to ordering them into more general categories within their language and how they see the world. Another concept that was crucial to the present study was horizontalization. The horizon presents an experience that cannot be bracketed; therefore, nothing is fully seen, as none of us are omniscient. Since a researcher may have thoughts and feelings based on new findings and experiences, horizontalization allows each statement proved by participants to be considered equally.<sup>8</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Katarzyna Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Guide*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2021), 47.

<sup>8</sup> Katarzyna, *How to Write*, 47.

two concepts of epoché and horizontalization are discussed respectively in the following two subsections.

### Epoché

The bracketing of personal beliefs and experiences allows researchers to enter a state of heightened consciousness because they have set aside their own experiences to become aware of personal prejudices, viewpoints, and assumptions.<sup>9</sup> This setting aside of personal experiences is called epoché, a Greek word that means “to refrain from judgment.” Through applying epoché, the present researcher refrained from imposing her past personal reflections on Suzuki’s teaching experiences to avoid bias in reporting (see Appendix F).

### Horizon

The phenomenological reduction process is the horizontalization of the data. A horizon refers to what comes into a person’s conscious experience and acts as a foundation or condition of the phenomenon. Horizons are believed to be unlimited because humans can never entirely use up their experiences of things, regardless of how many times they are reassessed.<sup>10</sup>

### Horizontalization

Horizontalization is part of the phenomenological reduction process, whereby the researcher gave equal value to all participants’ statements. The researcher removed all repetitive messages to provide an equal balance of attention to each word. Horizontalization takes the

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<sup>9</sup> Ellie Mae Burns and Catherine W. Gillespie, “A phenomenological Study of Attrition from a Doctoral Cohort Program: Changes in Feelings of Autonomy and Relatedness in the Dissertation Stage,” *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* Vol. 13 (2018): 522.

<sup>10</sup> Katrina Eddles-Hirsch, “Phenomenology and educational research,” *International Journal of Advanced Research* Volume 3, Issue 8 (2015): 259.

elements in a situation, similar to seeing a better view of situations, without assumptions or bias.<sup>11</sup> Moustakas mentioned that the concept of horizontalization encompasses phenomenological reduction.<sup>12</sup>

### **Definitions of Key Terms**

1. *Cognitive development (CD)* — A child’s information processing, conceptual resources, perceptual skill, language learning, and other aspects of the developed adult brain and cognitive psychology.<sup>13</sup>
2. *Physical development (PD)* — The brain and body’s growth and development in early childhood. PD refers to the growth and development of both the brain and the body and involves the development of control of the muscles and physical coordination.<sup>14</sup>
3. *Phenomenological reduction* — This term refers to perceiving and describing something in its totality, freshly and openly.<sup>15</sup> The task of phenomenological reduction is to describe what one sees in textual language.<sup>16</sup> The present researcher attempted to describe the study participants lived experiences, personal stories, teaching tips, and the phenomenon itself straightforwardly in the field of Suzuki pedagogy.

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<sup>11</sup> David Allan Rehorick and Valerie Malhotra Bentz, *Transformative Phenomenology: Changing Ourselves, Lifeworlds, and professional practice*, (Plymouth: UK, 2009), 16.

<sup>12</sup> Clark E. Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994), 34.

<sup>13</sup> “Cognitive development,” Help Me Grow, accessed June 28, 2022. <https://helpmegrowmn.org/HMG/HelpfulRes/Articles/WhatCognitiveDev/index.html>.

<sup>14</sup> “Physical development,” Early Childhood, accessed June 28, 2022. <https://earlychildhood.qld.gov.au/early-years/activities-and-resources/resources-parents/play/physical-development>.

<sup>15</sup> Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 90.



## Summary

Educators and parents may gain valuable information and knowledge from Suzuki experts through this descriptive phenomenological study. This study investigated Suzuki specialists' experiences through interviews and focus groups. Teachers can access Suzuki teaching resources for instruction to benefit young musicians. However, a review of existing literature revealed limited information on the effects of the Suzuki method on students' cognitive and physical development.

Studies in the existing literature incorporate the direct teaching experience of Suzuki specialists to explain how to maximize the benefits of the Suzuki method. Music educators and researchers require valid information for teaching methods and related research. This study examined Suzuki specialists' lived experiences to acquire beneficial information and knowledge to enhance the existing research literature. This research can encourage practical usage of the Suzuki to improve and enhance student learning.

Music educators and researchers may use Suzuki educators' teaching experience and academic knowledge of the Suzuki method to acquire a unique view and understanding of the Suzuki method. The phenomenological approach explores real-world experiences and practices. Therefore, this study can aid educators as a resource to help maximize children's cognitive and physical development.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, the benefit of instrumental music education is explained based on existing literature related to the Suzuki method. The first section discusses the physical connectivity between instrumental music instruction and anatomy systems processing by demonstrating the processing speed of children aged 8-12. With the exercise of left-hand strengthening and stretching, instrumentalists' performance intonation accuracy improved.<sup>1</sup> The second section explores Suzuki's philosophy, which guides the benefits of children's emotions. Lastly, the third section presents the progress made in social skills and collaboration progress through Suzuki's concept of group playing.

### **The Mental Effects of Suzuki Instruction**

The sound of music contributes to neuroplastic changes in the brain, and the brain's processing speed is a factor in the neuroanatomical effects among children.<sup>2</sup> Results of the California Verbal Learning Test for Children (CVLT-C) suggested that Suzuki instruction may promote positive neuroanatomical effects.<sup>3</sup> Bugos believed that Suzuki training may contribute strongly to one's ability to categorize sounds and aurally presented sequences rather than serially presented independent notes.<sup>4</sup> The CVLT-C also assesses the number of semantic clusters.

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<sup>1</sup> Bugos, "Semantic Clustering," 8.

<sup>2</sup> Bugos, "Semantic Clustering," 9.

<sup>3</sup> Bugos, "Semantic Clustering," 9.

<sup>4</sup> Bugos, "Semantic Clustering," 11.

Semantic clustering allows children to place memory pieces together on unanswered questions to complete the entire picture of their knowledge.

The Suzuki method is a successful string instrument pedagogy. It demonstrates that playing and listening to a string instrument cause human anatomical changes.<sup>5</sup> Michelle Cannon states that “anatomical research has shown processing pitch requires the sound wave to travel into the auditory canal of the outer ear, through the tympanic membrane or eardrum of the middle ear, and into the inner ear.”<sup>6</sup> Regarding the sound waves initiated by the vibration of string instruments, children understand the music more easily because they can visually interpret the pulses of strings. This is also a sophisticated approach to interpreting the sound of a beat with one’s ears. Cannon revealed that the auditory nerves can stimulate every part of the anatomy. The signal is finally deciphered bilaterally (i.e., on both sides of the brain) in the auditory cortex in the superior temporal lobe or Brodmann’s areas 41 and 42 (parts of the primary auditory cortex).<sup>7</sup> Since the Suzuki method involves following instructions, children listen to sounds and then mimic them.

In addition, the Suzuki method benefits physical health; thus, young students can experience physical benefits from understanding the Suzuki method. Such benefits are similar to those obtained through practicing Pilates. Standing Pilates can help to increase awareness of how the body moves and maintains balance (dynamic balance), which is extremely helpful for string

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<sup>5</sup> Michelle Chinn Cannon, “The Effects of Instrumental Music Instruction on the neurophysiological responses and adaptive behaviors on children with autism spectrum disorder” (PhD diss., The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2018), 35.

<sup>6</sup> Cannon, “The Effects of Instrumental Music,” 35.

<sup>7</sup> National Library of Medicine, “Brodmann areas 41 and 42,” accessed August 27, 2021. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28424401/>.

players.<sup>8</sup> The most well-known string pedagogy, the Suzuki method, has a similar teaching method to Pilates, providing balance and flexibility for music performers. According to Scott Pilates, Pilates primarily stresses balancing strength with flexibility to prevent injuries and achieve more efficient movement, hypothetically leading to improved body posture and awareness.<sup>9</sup> Just as one's body posture is involved in achieving optimal outcomes in music performance, body posture is also at the core of Pilates exercises. Balancing strength with flexibility is in line with Suzuki's philosophy, and Pilates' ideas regarding the optimal balance of mind and body are clearly influenced by ancient Greek philosophy.<sup>10</sup>

According to Maria Gallo, the body and mind must be coordinated to accomplish maximum results with minimum mental and physical energy expenditure and to live a long and healthy life. The Suzuki philosophy balances spiritual treatment with music education. It requires considerable training from the instructor to guide students correctly and efficiently.<sup>11</sup> An essential element of the Suzuki method is feedback on performance from peers and instructors after students play in a group with identical repertoires. Gallo acknowledged that playing an instrument requires a high concentration on the body and its movements. One of the aims when learning a string instrument is to hold the instrument and bowing, avoid tension and play as freely as possible.<sup>12</sup> Even though some parents and educators highlight the robotic performance

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<sup>8</sup> June Kloubec and Aaron L. Banks, "Pilates and Physical Education: A Natural Fit," *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance; Reston* Vol. 75, Iss. 4 (2004): 35.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Luciana Gallo, "Pilates and String Musicians: An Exploration of the Issues Addressed by the Pilates Method, an Illustrated Guide to Adapted Exercises, and a Pilates Course for University String Players" (Doctor of Musical Arts diss., Arizona State University, 2017), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Gallo, "Pilates and String Musicians," 38.

<sup>11</sup> Gallo, "Pilates and String Musicians," 41.

<sup>12</sup> Gallo, "Pilates and String Musicians," 51.

promoted by the Suzuki method, the standard posture it teaches helps correct incorrect posture when holding instruments and bows. From the beginning, successful string playing strategies emphasize performing the most straightforward tasks as correctly as possible based on individual abilities.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Gallo asserted that the player can alternate between standing and sitting when playing upper strings. While standing allows more freedom of the upper torso, it sometimes challenges the stability of the base. By contrast, sitting provides a more stable base but limits the freedom of the upper torso. Usually, a standing position is used for practice and solo performances, while a sitting position is adopted for most chamber ensembles and orchestral settings.<sup>14</sup> Regarding the recommendation for sitting positions in most chamber ensembles and orchestras, the Suzuki method is a unique approach for children playing while standing in a large group.

Moreover, according to Gallo, the Suzuki method can be assumed to encourage children to play instruments with both stability and freedom through playing while standing. Standing while playing an instrument requires children to develop a firm, robust base with their bodies, legs, and feet. The body must counterbalance this asymmetry with the support base and the legs.<sup>15</sup> The right balance and support are at the core of the Suzuki method's anatomical effects. M. Kojima noted that the Suzuki approach became popular in the United States in the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> In 1964, the same year as the Tokyo Olympics, ten children were brought to Washington University

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<sup>13</sup> Gallo, "Pilates and String Musicians," 52.

<sup>14</sup> Gallo, "Pilates and String Musicians," 118.

<sup>15</sup> Gallo, "Pilates and String Musicians," 119.

<sup>16</sup> M. Kojima, *Suzuki Method: Love and education of Shinichi Suzuki Tokyo* (Japan: Sōfūsha, 2016), 40.

to perform Bach's Double Concerto. Suzuki told the audience that these ten children could not have been more exceptionally talented.<sup>17</sup>

According to Cannon, when someone has listened to a rhythm, their body parts (e.g., a finger, hand, or foot) may spontaneously move along with the beat.<sup>18</sup> The Suzuki Cello Book Volume 1 introduces the song "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" as the first music piece. It presents rhythmic variations based on the original melody lines of the song. Said variations indicate the physical actions of the anatomy. The song includes four variations of rhythms by Suzuki.

Since music educators have adopted the Suzuki method in many countries with different languages, the method uses words from each native language to teach rhythm, which is highly effective. In the USA, the Suzuki method uses the following words: Variation A Mississippi Hot Dog; Variation B Bounce Roll Bounce; Variation C Run Mommy; Run Daddy; and Variation D Roll.<sup>19</sup> "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" demonstrates the vital rhythms necessary for the first 2 or 3 years; students will be familiar with them and can apply them to other pieces.<sup>20</sup> The rhythm teaching approach of the Suzuki method is practical and easy for young children.

According to an article by Cannon, several neurological researchers have found that the perception of rhythm activates motor areas of the brain even in the absence of any movement.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the Suzuki method points to the perception of rhythm that activates motor areas of the brain even without any movement. This discovery intrigues neuropsychologists as it has

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<sup>17</sup> M. Kojima, *Suzuki Method*, 40.

<sup>18</sup> Cannon, "The Effects of Instrumental Music Instruction," 36.

<sup>19</sup> Heesun Yeom, "Melody, Rhythm, and Note Reading in the Suzuki Piano School" (Master of Music diss., Western Illinois University, 2015), 19, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

<sup>20</sup> Yeom, "Melody, Rhythm," 21.

<sup>21</sup> Cannon, "The Effects of Instrumental Music Instruction," 37.

profound implications for connecting music and movement. Through rhythmic activations of the anatomy, children unconsciously experience the stimulation of body parts, improving their physical strength.

The musical performance involves a performer's character, posture, bowing, and body health. Children's mental and physical conditions affect their musical performance in terms of tonal beauty, intonation, rhythm, and character. The Suzuki method is related to the performer's health condition, as the body and its movements understand rhythms better than the brain. As the body responds to rhythm through movement, it provides the brain with information to process. The body provides the brain with the wherewithal to organize and retain knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

Suzuki Early Childhood Education (SECE) is a program in which a mixed-age group of children meets weekly. They build on concepts and skills laid out in the SECE repertoire while interacting with one another, their parents, and teachers. In the Suzuki method, parents play a central role in all activities, based on the belief that they are the child's first and most important teachers. Through parental participation in prenatal, baby, and preschool classes, parents become partners in providing an enriched natural environment for their children to grow.<sup>23</sup> This natural learning environment involving parents enhances the child's mind's stability, demonstrating the positive mental effects of Suzuki's instruction. It seeks to build on the child's natural delight in learning and lays the foundation for life-long learning, which meets Dr. Suzuki's goals for all children.

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<sup>22</sup> Edwin Gordon, *Learning Sequences in Music: A Contemporary Learning Theory* (Chicago: GIA Publications, Inc, 2007), 247.

<sup>23</sup> Suzuki Association of the Americas, "Suzuki Early Childhood Education," accessed February 1, 2023, <https://suzukiassociation.org/ece/about/>.

To create an educational learning environment for children that is free from pressure in which they can acquire skills, a sense of purpose in life, an understanding of discipline, and an appreciation of beauty, the SECE program includes strategies for aiding children's learning. First, as children learn from one another, those who play with other children learn from them. All children use their senses for learning, motivating them to imitate their peers. Second, success breeds success; that is, success in any task has some implicit rewards, but when the environment provides social or physical rewards (e.g., approval or a hug), a child will quickly learn to repeat the effort. Third, parental involvement is a critical strategy in the Suzuki method and is the key to positive mental effects. When parents are supportive and actively help their children, accurate parental feedback helps the learning process. Fourth, encouragement is essential. Thus, the social rewards from a supportive parent or adult accelerate the learning process, removing doubt about what constitutes success in a child's learning experience. No encouragement negates the fundamental reward of success in any learning experience. While the physical environment can provide the necessary reward, learning would be incomplete without encouragement in any aspect.<sup>24</sup>

According to Zachary Ebin, Suzuki believed that the ability to continually work on a goal, which he called "energy," and patience were essential for developing any skill. Suzuki often said that one must work "without hurry or rest," and he compared the development of ability in children to planting a seed. At first, it seems that nothing is happening; however, the seed germinates and grows with proper and constant care. One never sees it sprout if one lacks the energy to care for a seed. With the Suzuki method's mental effect, if the teacher, parent, and student lack the "energy" to repeat things often or to wait before seeing results, the student never

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<sup>24</sup> Suzuki Association of the Americas, "Suzuki Early Childhood Education."



becomes an accomplished human being.<sup>25</sup> Suzuki claimed that energy and patience are abilities that require training. He wrote, “[a]chievement is the product of energy and patience which must be trained like all other abilities.”<sup>26</sup> Suzuki trained students in energy and patience through demonstration. Both the teacher and parent assist the child in many repetitions of a skill daily. Furthermore, they would divide the necessary skills into small steps, not moving on to the next one until the student has mastered the current one. Suzuki teachers train students in energy and patience through reinforcement created by witnessing the results of such work. Suzuki believed that this type of music training would transfer to any skill, and therefore, the students could “follow Mother Nature and bring forth fruit.”<sup>27</sup> As a result, without patience and energy, students may not achieve anything, leading to adverse mental effects.

### **Suzuki’s Philosophy**

Shinichi Suzuki declared that “every child can learn.” His philosophy and method of music education have continued to spread worldwide, affecting the musical education of hundreds of thousands of children.<sup>28</sup> Since Suzuki founded his method of bowed string tuition in 1945, it has been adopted and embraced in countries worldwide.<sup>29</sup> For example, the Suzuki method has been an enormous hit in the United States, where diverse small children’s natural

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<sup>25</sup> Zachary Ebin, “Defining Nobility: The Goals of the Suzuki Method,” Suzuki Association of the Americas, accessed February 4, 2023, <https://suzukiassociation.org/news/defining-nobility-goals-suzuki-method/>.

<sup>26</sup> Suzuki Association of the Americas, “Suzuki Early Childhood Education.”

<sup>27</sup> Ebin, “Defining Nobility.”

<sup>28</sup> *The Strad*, “Global impact of Suzuki: The method and the movement,” accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.thestrad.com/teaching/global-impact-of-suzuki-the-method-and-the-movement/13607.article>.

<sup>29</sup> *The Strad*, “Suzuki teaching: Every child can,” accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.thestrad.com/latest-magazine/suzuki-teaching-every-child-can/13474.article>.

aptitudes are respected to raise them as members of a multicultural society.<sup>30</sup> Suzuki based his approach on the following beliefs: “Musical ability is not an inborn talent but an ability which can be developed. Any properly trained child can develop musical ability, just as all children develop the ability to speak their mother tongue. The potential of every child is unlimited.”<sup>31</sup> Suzuki’s Talent Education program criticizes music teachers who profess allegiance to the schools of Suzuki, Kodály, and Jacques-Dalcroze without giving in-depth or critical thought to the philosophies behind such methods:

There needs to be more [challenging of underlying assumptions] in music education. At the same time, some of the suggested approaches to music education have a relatively articulated philosophical basis. The development has arisen from, and discussions of their merit turn principally on, practical issues rather than the assumptions on which they are based. Such debate has yet to benefit from an intelligent, philosophical analysis of underlying assumptions. Teachers have defended their chosen method based on personal opinions rather than dispassionately reasoned arguments.<sup>32</sup>

Since Suzuki’s philosophy values the talents that children initially possess, children can preserve their habits, which may be the key to their future success. Suzuki intended for his followers to continually reflect upon and improve their way of living, teaching, playing, and thinking. He stated the following:

To have a superior model, to seek sincerely, and to search while practicing every day; [...] to think about what and how to practice enhancing ourselves step by step toward superior ability, superior sensitivity; in other words, to aspire toward a Way of life—this is also our path in music. Men [sic] who make great efforts but think nothing, simply playing a lot every day, will never become great. To avoid inadvertently following this route, we ought to consider the road we walk on as we apply ourselves diligently.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *The Strad*, “Suzuki teaching.”

<sup>31</sup> Suzuki Association of the Americas, “About the Suzuki method,” accessed February 1, 2023, <https://suzukiassociation.org/about/suzuki-method/>.

<sup>32</sup> Karin S. Hendricks, “The Philosophy of Shinichi Suzuki: Music Education as Love Education,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* Vol. 19, No. 2 (2011): 138.

<sup>33</sup> Hendricks, “The Philosophy of Shinichi Suzuki,” 139.

Suzuki's philosophy coincides with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), the United States K-12 public education policy. President Barack Obama signed ESSA on December 10, 2015. ESSA represents good news for America's schools. This bipartisan measure reauthorized the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunities for all students.<sup>34</sup> Before ESSA, Suzuki's philosophy insisted on the extraordinary value of every child and their right to education. The Suzuki method is an approach to music therapy that prioritizes healing children's hearts. This educational philosophy produces socially minded citizens who can contribute to peaceful and thriving societies.

Suzuki's philosophy is similar to Jean Piaget's, who contributed to children's cognitive development (CD). Piaget's theory of CD explains how a child constructs a mental model of the world. He disagreed that intelligence was a fixed trait, regarding CD as a process caused by biological maturation and environmental interactions.<sup>35</sup> Regarding Suzuki's "Every Child Can do" (ECC) Philosophy, Piaget also stressed that innate talent does not mean guaranteed success for young children. According to him, children are born with fundamental mental structures, both genetically inherited and evolved, upon which all their subsequent learning and knowledge are based.<sup>36</sup> Even though many people might assume that musical talent is mostly genetically inherited among young children, Suzuki and Piaget have insisted that education can enhance children's CD.

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<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of Education, "ESSA," accessed August 28, 2021, <https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=ft>.

<sup>35</sup> Saul McLeod, "Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development," *Simplypsychology*, August 18, 2022, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html>.

<sup>36</sup> McLeod, "Piaget's Stages."

Like Piaget, philosopher Ernst von Glasersfeld asserted that learning is an active process of self-organization in which the individual eliminates “perturbations” from interacting with others and actively construct viable knowledge adapted from such interactions. However, he also recognized the importance of social interaction as a process of meaning negotiation in this subjective construction of knowing.<sup>37</sup> Sociocultural constructivists emphasize social interaction and cultural practice in constructing knowledge in the Suzuki method.

Western music educators might consider John Cage’s “4’33,” – a philosophical treatise on the nature of the music, which they often refer to as ironically silent.<sup>38</sup> Since Suzuki supported spiritual freedom and musical talent, silence can represent the spiritual freedom of music-making. The Suzuki method has been successful among Western music educators because, by offering the musical pedagogy of Suzuki, it never forces students to learn strict Asian manners and culture..

Suzuki’s philosophy supports young children’s comfort of heart, bringing them mental strength. Children can make the peaceful sounds of musical performances by accepting much attention and love. Suzuki said, “[m]usic is a language of the heart without words.”<sup>39</sup> This statement resonates with the paradigm of music education as aesthetic education, “precisely and exactly for feeling what writing and reading do for reasoning.” Music education is “the education of feeling”, as our usual schooling in factual subjects is the education of thought. Furthermore, every child has value as a human being. Suzuki’s philosophy supports the difference in capacity for every child, which connects to the sentiments of aesthetic education. “A beautiful tone with a

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<sup>37</sup> “Constructivism and Learning,” Austin Peay State University, accessed February 3, 2023, <http://www.personal.psu.edu/users/w/x/wxh139/construct.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> Hendricks, “The Philosophy of Shinichi Suzuki,” 141.

<sup>39</sup> Hendricks, “The Philosophy of Shinichi Suzuki,” 141.

living soul, please,” requested Suzuki, which poignantly encapsulates his thoughts and experiences as a mature pedagogue and philosopher.<sup>40</sup> As Suzuki prioritized the beauty of children’s spirits and hearts, his aesthetic education concept had become a specialty among modern educators. He asserted that beauty in musical performance reflects the individual as a person, the individual’s attitude toward others, and one’s approach to life, which involves the individual’s whole personality, sensitivity to personal awareness, and capacity for being true to oneself. Beauty is something that an individual understands by understanding themselves.<sup>41</sup> At the core of Suzuki’s philosophy is individual respect for what children initially possess. This individual pedagogical approach leads every child to blossom in talent, aesthetics, and spirit.

The University of Hartford Suzuki department chair, Teri Einfeldt, gave six tips for maximizing educational benefits from the Suzuki method when Suzuki instructors teach young students. She insists on encouraging parental involvement, introducing notation at an early age, giving detailed instructions for practice sessions, including ensemble play as part of the learning process, introducing vibrato after the basic skills have been mastered, and fostering a love of music.<sup>42</sup> The most critical component could be the last tip – fostering a love of music – since Suzuki’s philosophy stressed young children’s equal learning opportunities to love music as a privilege of their valuable life.

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<sup>40</sup> Merlin Thompson, “Authenticity, Shinichi Suzuki, and “Beautiful Tone with Living Soul, Please,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* Vol. 24, No. 2 (2016): 176.

<sup>41</sup> Thompson, “Authenticity, Shinichi Suzuki,” 178.

<sup>42</sup> *The Strad*, “6 tips for teaching young violinists by Suzuki instructor Teri Einfeldt,” September 7, 2021, <https://www.thestrad.com/playing-hub/6-tips-for-teaching-young-violinists-by-suzuki-instructor-teri-einfeldt/141.article>.

According to Edward Lippman, the tone is a sign of life in that it reveals something of the physical nature of its source and the bodily activity from which it arises.<sup>43</sup> The relationship between instruments and performers creates the beauty of music. Since Suzuki's philosophy comprises "love education" and "talent education," students' performance affects the stable emotion from created through the individual approach included in Suzuki's philosophy. Ultimately, performers influenced by Suzuki's philosophy exhibit positive body activities, which reveal steady heartbeats and bright personalities. Thompson found that Suzuki acknowledged the influential significance of the music of Mozart as having taught him to know "perfect love, truth, goodness, and beauty."<sup>44</sup> The Mozart Clarinet Quartet led Suzuki to believe that mental health causes performers to play music spiritually. Suzuki described his reaction to the Clarinet Quartet as follows:

An indescribable sublime, ecstatic joy had taken hold of my soul. Through sound, for the first time in my life, I could feel the highest pulsating beauty of the human spirit, and my blood burned within me. It was a moment of sublime eternity when I, a human being, had gone beyond the limits of this physical body.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, Suzuki found spiritual joy through the Clarinet Quartet by Mozart. Each person has a personal daily life that develops their ability, talent, sensory perceptions, and heart. The Suzuki method can serve as a component of music therapy that heals the weakness of an individual's spirit.

Furthermore, Suzuki stated that ability does not develop innately.<sup>46</sup> Considering how a right hand is superior to a left hand, Suzuki considered training to be the key to creating

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<sup>43</sup> Edward Lippman, *A Humanistic Philosophy of Music* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2006), 111.

<sup>44</sup> Thompson, "Authenticity, Shinichi Suzuki," 180.

<sup>45</sup> Suzuki, *Nurtured*, 91.

<sup>46</sup> Suzuki, *Nurtured*, 53.

capability. Repetition leads to achievement. In Suzuki's Violin Book Volume 1, Suzuki composed six repetitive music pieces, one of which is titled "Allegro," which has the formation of repeats.

The mother-tongue approach requires the daily repetition, observation, and imitation of a language. Children who follow a routine tend to be more athletic and to possess greater spiritual health, which guides them toward future success. Furthermore, enhanced spirituality in education makes children comfortable with a musical instrument before they learn to read music. Suzuki's mother-tongue approach comprises the following steps (Suzuki 1974):

1. Structuring the home environment from birth so that the child is in constant contact with the medium to be learned.
2. Beginning instruction with straightforward tasks, using imitation and repetition as the basis of the teaching process.
3. Arranging for great daily practice.
4. Encouraging the child's interest in the medium to be learned by making it an integral part of positive interactions between the child and their family - especially with their mother.
5. Make learning fun by showering the child with praise and affection at each sign of increasing competence and making lessons and practice sessions challenging and enjoyable.<sup>47</sup>

Furthermore, Suzuki recommended that children be exposed daily from birth to many repetitions of a selected number of recordings of great musical works and the instrumental repertoire they will later learn.<sup>48</sup> Parents concerned about their children learning to read musical notes should be patient, just as students must be patient when learning to play musical instruments.

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas P. Rohlen and Gerald K. LeTendre, *Teaching and Learning in Japan* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 347.

<sup>48</sup> Rohlen, *Teaching*, 347.

The Japanese term *inochi* has spiritual undertones. It is suggestive of religious experiences that involve a person's soul and the phenomenon of anima mundi, or the soul of the world.<sup>49</sup> The meaning of *inochi* concerns the interconnection of all living creatures, while it also refers to "breath" and "dynamic energy." Second, *inochi* implies the process of being born, growing, aging, and dying, and thus the interplay between existence and death that represents a human life.<sup>50</sup> In addition, *inochi* may be interpreted as a vision of living that embraces notions from the individual to the universal, from the physical to the spiritual, affirming the wholeness of life and treasuring all life as irreplaceable, interconnected, finite, and infinite. According to Suzuki's philosophy, the meaning of *inochi* extends beyond the boundaries of being born, growing, aging, and dying. Music represents a wealthy life, while *inochi* is the engagement of living and soul. The Suzuki method highlights that music education that accounts for the soul assists the connection between students and teachers through their hearts. Living is enriched by the individual's active combination of body, heart, mind, and spirit, and through extensions and connections to community, culture, nature, and the universe.<sup>51</sup> The Suzuki method encourages the development of physical experiences of everyday life, the evolvment of emotional expressions, and the flourishing of the community's culture. Considering the connectivity between physical health and mental happiness, Suzuki might have known how to educate young children to bloom their quality of life. As a result, music education based on Suzuki's philosophy may lead children to thrive in the joy of life.

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<sup>49</sup> Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1992).

<sup>50</sup> Thompson, "Authenticity, Shinichi Suzuki," 182.

<sup>51</sup> Thompson, "Authenticity, Shinichi Suzuki," 183.



According to Suzuki's philosophy, during children's development process, they become self-confident, disciplined, talented, easily focused, and collaborative; socially, physically, emotionally, and academically developed; and sensitive individuals with advanced social skills who can appreciate art and music. Traditional violin teaching methods favor more conventional, individualized, and isolated training, thus promoting a different personality for the musicians in training. While traditional methods acknowledge the priority of reading music notation, traditional methods have strict technique standards. Moreover, traditional methods focus on the teacher, with the instructor driving students' learning. While the Suzuki method focuses on the student, making them the center of instruction and learning, students of traditional methods must learn how to study in groups of orchestra or chamber music while learning to play the instrument. Thus, they learn to participate in groups.<sup>52</sup>

### **Social Skills and Collaboration Through Group Playing**

In addition to emphasizing the importance of one-on-one tutors, the Suzuki method supports having group lessons and playing in groups once a week. Children like playing together and are motivated by watching each other. In group sessions, they feel less alone and develop a sense of security and trust. Related studies have indicated that children who play an instrument learn collaboration hand-eye coordination, develop their motor skills, and increase their spatial intelligence.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, as the part of the brain responsible for musical skills is also responsible for mathematical skills, these etudes enable brain exercises for children and help them to develop mathematical skills.

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<sup>52</sup> Hüseyin Bülent Akdeniz, "A Comparison of the Main Features of Suzuki and Traditional Violin Education," *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* Vol. 5, No. 2 (2015): 112.

<sup>53</sup> Cannon, "The Effects of Instrumental Music Instruction," 37.

Furthermore, music educators have demonstrated that the orchestra is a small society where students learn social skills and collaborate. The Suzuki method provides learning tools for enhancing orchestral experiences. Suzuki's violin classroom structure enables students to study together and share familiar repertoires, musical skills, and aspirations. Studying in a group is as critical as experiencing one-on-one lessons, and social interaction and opportunities to play in groups must be provided to make lessons effective. Group participation also provides children with the opportunity to observe peers who are at different levels. It helps them to develop skills such as practicing together, collaborating, and following the leader, directly affecting their future careers in orchestra and chamber music.

By contrast, traditional violin teachers generally use a classroom structure based on a one-on-one lesson model. There is little or no opportunity to observe others' practice sessions, and the lessons occur in an isolated environment. Competition among students often motivates them; thus, group music lessons could drive students to want to learn music.<sup>54</sup> The Suzuki method is based on teacher, student, and parent interactions. Colprit proposed the "rehearsal frame" as a unit of analysis for performance instruction in music.<sup>55</sup> The goal is a successful performance on the stage, which requires the collaboration and contribution of teamwork. The "rehearsal frame" reflects the competition and encouragement among peers in a classroom. Through group performance, children acquire social skills and cooperate with their classmates, while Suzuki's book steps group children together. In a group class, peers and parents participate

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<sup>54</sup> Akdeniz, "A Comparison of the Main Features of Suzuki," 110.

<sup>55</sup> Elaine J. Colprit, "Observation and analysis of Suzuki string teaching," *Journal of Research in Music Education; Reston* Vol. 48, Issue. 3, (2000): 209.

together along with the teachers. Playing in an ensemble makes children want to join in and play; therefore, they can learn to collaborate and harmonize music as a group performer.

According to Natalie Kuzmich, Suzuki's musical environment embraces repetitive listening and practice, good teaching and parental encouragement, individual and cooperative group learning, play, and social interaction.<sup>56</sup> Interaction with parents and peers helps students to develop musical skills, well-rounded personalities, a positive sense of self, and respect and concern for others. These benefits lead children to have better mental and physical health and well-being. Lois Peak stated that Suzuki sought to develop sensitivity, refined character, and well-developed general abilities in his students through the study of music.<sup>57</sup> Based on the standards of Suzuki's philosophy, the healthy all-around person would be the most successful role model. Said philosophy advocates the mental and physical health of children's anatomy.<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, Glenn Schellenberg et al. demonstrated that group music training and prosocial skills were positively associated among eight to nine-year-old children but only those with poor social skills at the beginning of the study.<sup>59</sup> Children's intrinsic interest in music is also likely to foster cooperation, particularly in a social environment that emphasizes social-emotional development over academic factors (e.g., grades in school). Even though the Suzuki method has no direct correlation to academic grades, it has other unexpected benefits, such as social skills, cooperation, and the development of academic achievement.

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<sup>56</sup> Natalie Kuzmich, "The Prelude: Repetition, Suzuki, Minimalists and Zen," *Canadian Music Educator* Vol.49, No.3 (2008): 6.

<sup>57</sup> Rohlen, *Teaching*, 349.

<sup>58</sup> Suzuki, *Nurtured*, 91.

<sup>59</sup> E Glenn Schellenberg, et al., "Group Music Training and Children's Prosocial Skills," *PLoS One; San Francisco* Vol. 10, Iss. 10, (2015): 8. DOI:10.1371/journal.pone.0141449.

Since the central philosophy of the Suzuki method includes repetition, group interaction and cooperation by an ensemble, the stimulation of listening, and communicative involvement with parents, the social-emotional score is associated with its benefits. The Suzuki Association of the Americas states that children learn and motivate each other by participating in regular group lessons and performances.<sup>60</sup> While the Suzuki method may differ between Japan and the United States, encouragement from parents and peers may improve children's social skills. Part of Suzuki's philosophy is human education, which represents morality, character building, and appreciation for the beauty of daily life.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, Suzuki emphasized the necessity of adopting group lessons in which more advanced and younger students play together.<sup>62</sup> The Suzuki approach allows students to learn by themselves when playing with peers since they can observe their peers' performance. Their social and collaborative skills grow from these group performances or lessons. Children experience social relationships and belongingness through schools, sports, and musical ensembles. However, they wish to maintain the originality that Suzuki's philosophy guarantees and may require time to adjust between their individuality and social rules. Playing in a group naturally helps children establish social skills and harmonization in a community while retaining their originality, innate talent, and identity. Just as a sponge absorbs water slowly and naturally, children maintain a sense of themselves while acquiring social skills and interaction through playing instruments under the Suzuki method.

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<sup>60</sup> Suzuki Association of the Americas, "About the Suzuki Method."

<sup>61</sup> Kara Eubanks, "Essays in the theory and practice of the Suzuki Method" (Doctor of Musical Arts diss., City University of New York, 2015), 77, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

<sup>62</sup> Eubanks, "Essays in the theory."

Lev Vygotsky, a Russian teacher and psychologist, first stated that we learn through our interactions and communications with others and that learning occurs through students' interactions with their peers, teachers, and other experts.<sup>63</sup> The Suzuki method represents musical interaction between peers through group performances. These learning communities allow children to interact with peers and learn critical social skills.

Vygotsky identified the following strategies to apply when implementing social learning theory. First, students should be helped to develop learning communities; second, the classroom should be made a community for learners; third, collaborative learning and group work should be encouraged; lastly, discussion-based learning should be created. The core of Vygotsky's social learning theory reflects the Suzuki method's group performance curriculum. Thus, the Suzuki method encourages young students to experience collaborative learning communities as they make music together.

Social learning theory, proposed by Albert Bandura, emphasizes the importance of observing, modeling, and imitating the behaviors, attitudes, and emotional reactions of others.<sup>64</sup> As a mother tongue, the Suzuki method demonstrated how children learn musical play by imitating peers' and teachers' musical performances, which may advocate Bandura's social learning theory. Said theory considers how environmental and cognitive factors influence human learning and behavior. At the same time, the Suzuki method encourages musical interaction among peers by making group performance as an essential part of their curriculum.

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<sup>63</sup> Linda S. Neff, "Lev Vygotsky and Social Learning Theories," *Educational Technology*, accessed January 31, 2023, <https://jan.ucc.nau.edu/lsn/educator/edtech/learningtheorieswebsite/vygotsky.htm>.

<sup>64</sup> Saul McLeod, "Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory," *Simplypsychology*, accessed February 1, 2023, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/bandura.html>.

Moreover, Suzuki promoted music education to develop “noble hearts and minds in children” and create “a better world through music.”<sup>65</sup> Inspired by World War II, Suzuki sought to positively affect the world through music that provided children and their generation a better future. This sentiment captures the aspirations of his explorative youth and his post-World War II vision of music education while, more crucially, underscoring his interpretation of music instruction as the development of “noble human beings to make the world more peaceful and loving.”<sup>66</sup> More than acquiring social skills or life techniques, Suzuki’s philosophy guides children to share life values and cooperation, thus contributing to peace and love for the world.

Music appreciation is an introductory music education course that provides students with comprehensive music knowledge. Suzuki desired to become a musical performer and understand art, the beauty of tone in his daily life. During his eight years in Berlin, Suzuki gradually came to understand beauty, which he called the meaning of musical performance, not considering it to be distant and beyond understanding. He wrote the following:

Through music, I found my work and purpose in life. Once, art to me was something far off, unfathomable, and unattainable. However, I discovered it was a tangible thing. The real essence of art turned out not to be something high up and far off, and it was right inside my ordinary self.<sup>67</sup>

The essence of art and the meaning of music in tone and sound existed within his daily self, captured in musical performance and in how people greet others or express themselves.<sup>68</sup> In the ordinary life of human beings, Suzuki attempted to find appreciation, beauty, and peace. Children experience the comfort of the mind by playing music under the Suzuki philosophy. If

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<sup>65</sup> Suzuki, *Nurtured*, 114.

<sup>66</sup> Hendricks, “The Philosophy of Shinichi Suzuki,” 4.

<sup>67</sup> Suzuki, *Nurtured*, 94.

<sup>68</sup> Thompson, “Authenticity, Shinichi Suzuki,” 178.

children know how to appreciate being themselves, then they will understand other peers' perspectives, lives, and curiosities. Suzuki asserted that beauty in musical performance reflects the individual, their attitude toward others, and their approach to life, which involves their whole personality, sensitivity to personal awareness, and capacity for being true to oneself. Based on Suzuki's philosophy, children learn to embrace others by playing music.

At the 1975 Suzuki Method International Teachers' Convention, Suzuki emphasized "breath and spirit in playing" in his summary of the purposes of music education.<sup>69</sup> Children learn cooperation through the preparation of important missions in the classroom. When children prepare a concert on the stage under the Suzuki method, they share purpose, breath, goals, and spirit. Suzuki expressly brought together beauty, tone, and living soul in the following signature statement: "A beautiful tone with the living soul, please," from the Japanese "*Utsukushiki oto ni inochi o.*"<sup>70</sup> If children learn about collaboration with Suzuki's philosophy, they may experience sharing living souls with their peers. Even though some educators have highlighted that the Suzuki method encourages robotic performance, a deficit of reading notes, and no creativity, children may obtain spiritual healing through the Suzuki method.

According to Elaine Colprit's research, a relationship between the communication of Suzuki-trained teachers and students leads to successful student performance and the highest quality of the music education system.<sup>71</sup> Observations of Suzuki lessons may be required to understand more about the complexity of teacher-student interactions and their relationship with successful student performance. The reason for the Suzuki method's success is the involvement

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<sup>69</sup> Evelyn Hermann, *Shinichi Suzuki: The Man and His Philosophy* (Athens, OH: Ability Development Associates Inc., 1981), 185.

<sup>70</sup> Thompson, "Authenticity, Shinichi Suzuki," 181.

<sup>71</sup> Colprit, "Observation," 218.

of parents in evaluating student performance. Parents of Suzuki students tend to attend their children's lessons even though the improvement of social skills happens among peers in a classroom. Suzuki realized that social interaction is significant in education. Thus, he planned group lessons to increase the interaction between the children. According to Suzuki (2010), children mostly enjoy making music in groups. According to Sever, younger children copy what adults do, while older children develop sensitivity and empathy toward younger children in Suzuki class.<sup>72</sup> The Suzuki method employs peer interaction through group playing, thereby enhancing social and communication skills and interactional development in society. The Suzuki method supports communication skills and interaction levels. Communication and feedback guide students in socializing and compromising with community members, colleagues, and classmates.

### **Literature Review Summary**

Many music teachers and parents may question how the Suzuki method affects children's cognitive and physical development. The benefits may include enhancing their social, motor, memorization, verbal, and performance skills. Based on Bugos' research and report of the CVLT-C results of children who experienced Suzuki instruction, employing the Suzuki method for instructions may influence and improve the development of memorization and verbal skills.<sup>73</sup> Bugos believed that Suzuki training may contribute more strongly to cognitive development (CD) among children.<sup>74</sup> Suzuki's philosophy posited that "every child can learn" and the right to

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<sup>72</sup> Gülşah Sever, "Online course adaptation process of Suzuki Early Childhood Education Program" *Turkish Journal of Education* Vol. 10, Iss. 3 (2021): 197.

<sup>73</sup> Bugos, "Semantic Clustering," 11.

<sup>74</sup> Bugos, "Semantic Clustering," 11.



education for every child ahead of ESSA. As a music therapy that prioritizes the healing of the heart, Suzuki's philosophy insists on mentally and physically educating the whole child.<sup>75</sup> This philosophy of education produces socially minded citizens who contribute to peaceful and thriving societies. Suzuki's philosophy is called love education, which encourages positive physical activities for children that develop steady heartbeats and bright personalities.

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<sup>75</sup> Suzuki Association of the Americas, "Every Child Can Learn," accessed April 12, 2023, <https://suzukiassociation.org/about/suzuki-method/>.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### **Introduction**

For this study, the researcher applied a phenomenological methodology to illuminate detailed descriptions and the personal meanings of lived experiences related to the Suzuki method's benefits. In collecting the interview data, the researcher focused on each Suzuki specialist's personal teaching experience. The interview participants were divided into two categories based on their years of Suzuki teaching experience. One group consisted of participants with less than five years of Suzuki teaching experience, while the other group were those with over five years of Suzuki teaching experience. The interview data from these two groups helped to provide a broad view of the Suzuki method's impact on children's cognitive development (CD) and physical development (PD).

This study explored the opinions of experienced Suzuki specialists regarding the effect of Suzuki activities on children's CD and PD, which were analyzed using a phenomenological research approach. The study also aimed to identify how Suzuki specialists guide young students toward growth. Determining how these specialists encourage proper posture and skill memorization may help other music teachers to incorporate Suzuki pedagogy with maximum benefits. Considering Suzuki specialists' lived experiences and existing related literature, this study demonstrates how the Suzuki method affects children's development.

### **Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive phenomenological research design and was guided by one central qualitative research question and two sub-questions. The purpose of

phenomenological research is to understand the lifeworld experiences of a specific population.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Suzuki specialists' lived experiences were the central phenomenon.<sup>2</sup> Following an analysis of the interview data, this study shared lived experiences, practical information, and experts' knowledge concerning how to facilitate children's development. The interview data were analyzed in two groups, distinguished by years of teaching experience. One group comprised Suzuki specialists with less than five years of experience, while the other comprised Suzuki specialists with more than five years of experience. In addition, interview transcripts published online concerning the Suzuki method were analyzed as a part of phenomenological research.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions explored the experts' lived experiences and opinions:

**Central RQ:** How do Suzuki specialists describe their lived teaching experiences?

**SQ1.** How do Suzuki specialists describe their experiences of teaching elements related to PD?

**SQ2.** How do Suzuki specialists describe their experiences of teaching elements related to CD?

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<sup>1</sup> Peoples, *How to Write*, 47.

<sup>2</sup> John W. Creswell and David J. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2018), 181.

### Researcher's Role

The researcher's role in phenomenological research has the following seven stages: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying, and reporting.<sup>3</sup> In the present study, the researcher focused on the transcribing stage to portray Suzuki specialists' teaching experience and opinions as provided through interviews and focus groups. During the interviews, the researcher encouraged participants to provide unique teaching stories beyond typical Suzuki method descriptions. As a result, some participants also described significant experiences of working with mentally and physically disabled students.

### Participants

The focus group interview participants were Suzuki specialists ( $N = 6$ ), including teachers, researchers, and Suzuki Association board members with Suzuki method teaching experience or researching the Suzuki method within the past five years in the United States. Participants knowledgeable in Suzuki teaching were recruited based on the purposeful sampling technique.<sup>4</sup> Since the interview data were gathered from the chosen groups, applying homogeneity helped to reduce variation and simplify the data analysis. A common phenomenon is a central point linking individual experiences.<sup>5</sup> The Suzuki teaching method was the central point of this study. Six experts in the field of Suzuki instruction responded to email invitations. They agreed to participate in the interviews and provided their consent to participate. The

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<sup>3</sup> Anne Sofie Fink, "The Role of the Researcher in the Qualitative Research Process. A Potential Barrier to Archiving Qualitative Data," *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 1(3), Art. 4 (2000). <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs000344>.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence A. Palinkas, et al., "Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research," *Administration and policy in mental health*, 42(5) (2015): 533. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>.

<sup>5</sup> Creswell, *Research Design*, 78.

researcher interviewed the six Suzuki specialists via Zoom or Google Teams, video-conferencing platforms. Each participant's name was replaced with a pseudonym to allow anonymity. The interview participants received a US\$25 Amazon gift card upon completion of the study as a reward for their participation.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher developed six interview and focus group questions to explore the Suzuki specialists' teaching stories. The researcher also applied Suzuki's comments from the International Suzuki Association's interview videos with him to enhance further the validity of the interview and focus group questions.<sup>6</sup> In another video-recorded interview, Suzuki described his approach to children's music education and working with parents. He emphasized many of the key elements of the mother tongue method, including environment, repetition, ability, listening, parental involvement, review, group classes, and observation.<sup>7</sup>

In a Suzuki Association of the Americas article, Pam Brasch described the positive and long-term effects of the Suzuki method, which includes child cooperation and enhanced self-esteem.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, an International Suzuki Association video titled, *On Educating Children*, addressed the development of Suzuki's teaching method for elementary school students.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> International Suzuki Association, "History of the Suzuki," accessed April 16, 2023, <https://internationalsuzuki.org/william-starr/video-index>.

<sup>7</sup> Suzuki, "Suzuki applied the Talent Education Method in teaching math, reading, and other subjects" (interview video), directed by International Suzuki Association, accessed May 5, 2023, 38:18, <https://internationalsuzuki.org/william-starr/interviews-educating-children>.

<sup>8</sup> International Suzuki Association, "Parent Perspective," accessed June 1, 2023, <https://suzukiassociation.org/about/suzuki-method/>.

<sup>9</sup> International Suzuki Association, "On Educating Children," accessed June 5, 2023, <https://internationalsuzuki.org/william-starr/video-index>.<https://internationalsuzuki.org/william-starr/interviews-educating-children>.

Moreover, Hotta illustrated the educational benefits of the Suzuki method, tips for enhancing students' development, and pedagogical approaches to learning instruments through Suzuki-trained teachers.<sup>10</sup> The relationship between the interview questions and the critical elements drawn from the Suzuki interview videos could have enhanced the validity of the interview and focus group questions and the transferability of the research findings. The questions were also peer-reviewed to establish further validity and reliability.<sup>11</sup>

### Interview Questions

1. How do you approach the Suzuki method with your students to obtain maximum educational benefits?
2. What factors of the Suzuki method make students experience cognitive development, including growth in their memorization skills, motor processing speed, intelligence, social skills, and verbal skills?
3. Have you taught music using the Suzuki method to students with developmental delays such as autism? If yes, would you share the story of that experience?
4. Would you describe how you've seen the Suzuki method influence children's constructive growth, including physical development?
5. How does the Suzuki method approach the pedagogical bow technique, left-hand articulation, and performance posture?
6. How do you answer parents when they complain about the lack of note-reading and robotic playing?

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<sup>10</sup> Eri Hotta, *Suzuki: The Man and His Dream to Teach the Children of the World* (London, Harvard University Press, 2022), 123.

<sup>11</sup> Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 68.

### Focus Group Questions

1. How does the Suzuki method enhance the overall cognitive development of young students, including memorization skills, motor skills, intelligence, processing speed, and language acquisition?
2. How does the Suzuki method support young students' mental stability and peace of mind?
3. How does the Suzuki method enhance the overall physical development of young students?
4. What is the Suzuki posture instruction that helps young students avoid physical injuries and muscle pain?
5. In your opinion, what factors of the Suzuki method make it popular among parents, educators, and students?
6. What do you believe is key to maximizing the benefit of the Suzuki method for young students' development?

### Procedures

The contact information of potential participants was acquired from the Suzuki Association of the Americas' website. The researcher recruited Suzuki teachers, board members, and researchers via email. The email included a link to Google Forms, where participants acknowledged their consent before accessing demographic-related questions. Before participating in the interviews, each participant reviewed and signed a consent form electronically.<sup>12</sup> The goal was to recruit six participants. Non-respondents received a follow-up

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<sup>12</sup> Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 92.

email to encourage participation one week after the initial invitation. The researcher scheduled interviews with six participants, each of whom completed a 30-minute interview conducted by the researcher, which allowed participants to consider and fully respond to each interview question. Participants volunteered to participate in a subsequent focus group session. An audio recording of each interview and focus group session was created to ensure the accurate transcription of the qualitative data for later analysis and to develop themes to discuss.

Furthermore, each participant's confidentiality was maintained. To protect their actual name, the researcher applied pseudonyms. The interview data were stored on a password-locked computer to ensure participants' confidentiality, and they were deleted upon the study's completion.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using *Delve*, a textural analysis software program, to convey the participants' lived experiences and expert knowledge. The researcher identified code categories based on themes that emerged from participants' interviews and focus group responses regarding Suzuki instruction. Furthermore, the code categories led to the recognition of distinct themes that were necessary for discussing findings and drawing conclusions.

Moreover, the researcher applied epoché in the data collection and then extended its application into the data analysis. In epoché, the goal is to illuminate the essence of a phenomenon without the corruption of personal bias. The researcher focused on stories and experiences shared by the participants. In addition, horizontalization allowed for the interview data to be simplified with the following five themes: parental involvement, encouragement with a positive mindset, playing by ear, group play, and fine muscle development. The detailed interview responses were categorized into two groups according to the teaching experience level



of the participants. By allowing participants to confirm their responses, the research validity was enhanced.

### **Summary**

This study employed a phenomenological research methodology. A central research question and two sub-questions related to the Suzuki method were created to respond to the need and purpose of the study. The Suzuki Association of the Americas' official website was used to identify potential subjects and recruit participants for the research. Six Suzuki specialists with five years or more of experience teaching children with the Suzuki method volunteered to participate in the research. Interview questions were created by reviewing Suzuki-related articles and applying Suzuki's interview responses, demonstrating the constructive effect of learning musical instruments with the mother tongue method related to Suzuki's philosophy. The interview and focus group responses were transcribed and subsequently analyzed using the *Delve* qualitative analysis tool to develop themes for further consideration and discussion.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

This descriptive phenomenological study aimed to describe the teaching experiences of Suzuki specialists who have taught young musicians for at least five years. Parents, music educators, and researchers could benefit from a resource on how the Suzuki method enhances young children's mental and physical growth. After conducting interviews with the Suzuki teaching experts, the researcher addressed the findings based on their lived teaching experience, which directly impacts children's development and growth, including both cognitive development (CD) and physical development (PD).

The researcher used pseudonyms for the interviewees when presenting the results instead of their actual names to provide anonymity. This chapter presented the data analysis and described each interview participant with over five years of Suzuki teaching experience. The data analysis enabled the research questions to be answered and a guideline to be developed for future research on the Suzuki method for ensuring educational benefits for children. The research questions are as follows:

Central research question: How do Suzuki specialists describe their lived teaching experiences?

**SQ1.** How do Suzuki specialists describe their experiences of teaching elements related to PD?

**SQ2.** How do Suzuki specialists describe their experiences of teaching elements related to CD?

### Setting

This research setting took place via Google Teams or Zoom after the researcher arranged the interview schedule with each participant. After receiving the recruitment emails, each participant agreed to their interview schedule and signed the online interview consent form. Some interview participants who are not familiar with Zoom, used Google Teams for their interview.

### Participant Demographics

The interview participants were recruited from the Suzuki Association of the Americas. The six participants had built their Suzuki teaching careers for over five years. Among them, four were string instrument teachers, and two were piano teachers. Two participants were men, while the remaining four were women. Three participants had Suzuki teaching experience for over five years of Suzuki experience, while the other three had over ten years of Suzuki teaching experience. The researcher assigned pseudonyms and arranged the interviewees in order based on their years of Suzuki teaching experience. Table 1 presents the participants' demographics:

**Table 1. Participant Demographics**

Participant	Years of Experience	Gender	Primary Instruments	Related Experience
Braden	5	Male	Violin/Viola	Suzuki Training
Joy	5	Female	Violin	Suzuki Training
Tom	6	Male	Piano	Suzuki Training
Tiff	18	Female	Violin/Viola	Suzuki Training
May	20	Female	Violin/Viola	Suzuki Training
Lily	25	Female	Piano	Suzuki Training

## Braden

Braden had been a Suzuki specialized teacher teaching violin and viola for over five years with the Suzuki method. He had completed his Suzuki training and been inspired by the teaching principles of Suzuki. He believed that every child has the potential to succeed when provided with a supportive environment.

## Joy

Joy was a Suzuki specialized teacher who had taught violin with the Suzuki method for over 5 years. She had studied Suzuki violin pedagogy. She loved teaching because it allowed her to be an active part of her student's growth. She especially enjoyed teaching young children aged four to seven years.

## Tom

Tom was a piano faculty member at the Suzuki Institute of Dallas for six years, teaching piano lessons and group classes to students of all ages. He possessed over five years of Suzuki teaching experience. He was finishing his dissertation on the legacy of Suzuki piano teacher Mary Craig Powell for his doctoral degree in piano performance and piano pedagogy.

## Tiff

Tiff had raised a Suzuki student, starting violin at the age of 3 years. She had taught the violin with the Suzuki method for over ten years. She was dedicated to living and teaching Suzuki philosophy. Furthermore, she received extensive training through the Suzuki Association for Violin Books 1-8 and several other enrichment courses. Tiff had also served two years as Director of the Suzuki Strings Program.

May

May was a Suzuki-certified, Juilliard-trained violin teacher who had taught her students using the Suzuki method for the last 20 years. May co-founded and ran the Suzuki violin program for four years. She authored a widely referenced article about the Suzuki method, titled “The Mom-Centric Method,” for The Los Angeles Times, a phrase she coined to describe the most prominent element in Suzuki’s teaching philosophy. The article has been referenced by hundreds of sources and is cited in the Wikipedia entry on the Suzuki method.

Lily

With over 25 years of Suzuki teaching experience as a piano instructor, Lily excelled at motivating and nurturing students to perform to their fullest potential. She possessed experience teaching young children starting at the age of 3 years, students with a variety of special needs, and adults of various ages studying an instrument for the first time. She believed that with love, instruction, and the proper environment, everyone could learn and enjoy the beautiful gift of music.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher collected data from active Suzuki teachers with Suzuki method teaching experience of at least five years. The researcher conducted personal interviews through Microsoft Teams or Zoom. The participants answered a predetermined series of questions regarding their demographics, the philosophy of their education in the Suzuki method, and the benefits of the method for their student’s development. The researcher scheduled each interview by email. Interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each.

## Findings

The researcher transcribed each participant's audio-recorded interview data into a typed document before analyzing the interview data using the coding software program, *Delve*. During the data analysis process, the researcher found that the participants had responded with many similarities and few differences in their Suzuki method opinions based on their teaching experience. To eliminate bias, the researcher applied epoché by providing answers to the same interview questions (Appendix F). Moreover, the researcher utilized horizontalization to reduce repetitive words from the participants' interview data. The researcher identified the following five themes using *Delve*: parental involvement, encouragement with a positive mindset, playing by ear, group play, and fine muscle development. This study aimed to discover answers to the research questions based on the participants' teaching experience of the Suzuki method. The five themes were the most frequent keywords in the participants' responses. Table 2 presents the codes of data.

**Table 2. Coding**

Codes	Related Terms	Related Theme
Parents	Foster parents, family	Parental Involvement
Lessons	Studio, individual, group	Parental Involvement
Consistency	Attendance, support, priority	Parental Involvement
Encouragement	Spoken, unspoken	Encouragement With a Positive Mindset
Mindset	Self-talk, philosophy	Encouragement With a Positive Mindset
Thought process	Cognition, concrete, abstract	Encouragement With a Positive Mindset
Mother tongue	Language, mimicking, repetition	Playing by Ear
Listening	Ear training, repetitive melodies, multi-sensory	Playing by Ear
Play Game	Fun play, puzzle, Intelligence	Playing by Ear
Repetition	Familiar music, interaction, collaboration, harmony	Group Play
Memorization	Peer pressure, group projects, environment	Group Play
Posture	Relaxed body, muscle pain, mental control	Fine Muscle Development
Balance	Collarbone, isolated muscle, finger pattern	Fine Muscle Development
Finger Articulation	Warm-up, practice, bowing	Fine Muscle Development

#### Theme Development

The researcher discovered the following five themes: (1) parental involvement; (2) encouragement with a positive mind; (3) play by ear; (4) group play; and (5) fine muscle development. These five themes were developed after careful transcription, coding, and focus

group data analysis. Table 3 lists the participants in order from the fewest to the most years of experience (Braden, 5; Joy, 5; Tom, 6; Tiff, 18; May, 20; Lily, 20). Table 3 illustrates each one's contribution to discussing individual themes.

**Table 3. Table of Themes**

Theme	Braden	Joy	Tom	Tiff	May	Lily
Parental Involvement	X	X		X	X	X
Encouragement With a Positive Mindset			X	X	X	X
Playing by Ear	X	X		X		X
Group Play	X	X	X			
Fine Muscle Development		X	X		X	X

#### Introduction of Themes

#### Parental Involvement

Students tend to have better academic outcomes when parents stay involved in their academic environment. Most participants stressed that parental involvement is the key factor in introducing the Suzuki method when they teach musical instruments to students with developmental delays. Regarding the importance of learning postures in the Suzuki method, four participants who have taught string instruments insisted that parental involvement made young students or students with developmental delays acquire better learning outcomes in learning musical instruments than students who did not benefit from parental involvement in Suzuki classes. Tiff mentioned, "The Suzuki method has an important component, parental involvement. Parental involvement even changes students' attitudes toward lessons. Parental involvement helped students feel secure with their parents, and students seemed comfortable in their Suzuki



method classes due to the musical activities with their parents.”<sup>1</sup> Joy stated, “Before any of the students start a music lesson with me, I always sit down with their parents and have a long conversation with them.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Encouragement With a Positive Mindset**

According to Suzuki’s book, *Nurtured*, all children are noble.<sup>3</sup> Each student may achieve a positive mindset through learning instruments using the Suzuki method. Tom addressed the following: “I use the Suzuki method’s positive thinking to nurture students’ mentality to learn music. A positive thinking strategy will always help students have a stable mindset and happy mood to become positive people.”<sup>4</sup> Tom has taught students using the traditional and Suzuki methods to compare learning achievement. While he could not find much difference between the traditional and Suzuki methods for the academic results, he found that students learning piano in Suzuki classes seemed to show confidence and a positive mindset.

### **Playing by Ear**

Learning to play musical instruments by listening requires a high level of focus from children. When students listen to music, multiple brain areas become engaged and active.<sup>5</sup> To approach children’s PD through the Suzuki method, listening and playing skills using ears and body parts may answer the RQ. Lily stated, “Piano lessons based on the Suzuki method also

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<sup>1</sup> Tiff, interview by author, November 22, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Joy, interview by author, December 7, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Suzuki, *Nurtured*, 114.

<sup>4</sup> Tom, interview by author, January 19, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Anita Collins, “How playing an instrument benefits your brain,” TED Talks, accessed July 7, 2023, [https://www.ted.com/talks/anita\\_collins\\_how\\_playing\\_an\\_instrument\\_benefits\\_your\\_brain/transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/anita_collins_how_playing_an_instrument_benefits_your_brain/transcript).

require listening training since the Suzuki method represents playing and learning by ear. So, I would say if the ear listening ability is a part of physical development, the Suzuki method aids physical development.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Group Play**

Group play in the Suzuki method can enhance students’ interaction and social skills under peer pressure. While the piano is an individual instrument, students could experience group play, in which students can learn collaborative skills and social skills through the Suzuki method. In addition, string instrument players can experience the orchestra performance in advance when they play in a group. Joy mentioned the following: “[The] Suzuki group class helps tremendously with social skills as it forces students to work with a much larger group to sound like one violin sound.”<sup>7</sup> The specialty of the Suzuki method’s group play is that students play Suzuki pieces with their peers who have similar performance levels. For example, young students may feel unconfident to play in front of peers who can play advanced performance level musical pieces. However, if students play musical pieces with peers who attain similar amount of experience years, they could acquire healthy peer pressure and motivation without losing confidence in music.

### **Fine Muscle Development**

Muscles and PD are related, and the Suzuki method may enhance children’s fine muscle development with left-hand articulation training. May demonstrated the following: “Learning to play the violin using the Suzuki method enables students to isolate muscles, finger patterns,

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<sup>6</sup> Lily, interview by author, December 27, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Joy, interview.

arms, head, shoulder, even stomach, and feet in such a way that gives students a sense of their body parts that young kids aren't aware of.”<sup>8</sup> Regarding the chopsticks users' sensitive finger sensors after using chopsticks every day, the repetitive musical notes for intensive finger work-out through Suzuki's instruction in music playing may enhance children's fine muscle development related to PD.

## Discussion of Themes

### **Parental Involvement**

Among the six participants, four stated that parental involvement maximizes the benefits of the Suzuki method. Furthermore, four participants experienced most students demonstrating enormous improvements in performance posture, technique, and memorization of musical pieces when parents were involved in their lessons. In short, students in elementary school follow their teacher's instruction with a peaceful mindset due to their parents being present.

According to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) article, research demonstrated that parent engagement is closely linked to better student behavior, higher academic achievement, and enhanced social skills.<sup>9</sup> Much existing research suggests that parental involvement is one of the most critical factors in enhancing students' academic outcomes and social skills, which appear in students' CD and PD.<sup>10</sup>

When asked about the impact of parental involvement, Joy stated, “Before any of the students start a music lesson with me, I always sit down with their parents and have a long

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<sup>8</sup> May, interview by author, November 25, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Parent Engagement in Schools,” last modified August 7, 2018, [https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/parent\\_engagement.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/parent_engagement.htm).

<sup>10</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, “Parent Engagement,”

conversation with them. The journey we take together will teach students and parents many more things than how to play music. We can maximize the Suzuki method's benefits by discussing parents' and students' communication. I have taught students with ADHD; patience was the big thing with that student. I think with those students, it is beneficial not to focus on posture and music-making at the beginning. Also, parents need to be heavily involved, as one of Suzuki's instructions [is] parents' involvement."<sup>11</sup>

In addition, Braden felt that the most vital of Suzuki's perspective is parental involvement in students' lessons. However, he interpreted Suzuki's concept of parental involvement slightly differently, defining it as collaborative work during music lessons. He mentioned the following: "The most important aspect of the Suzuki approach is the triangle, in which all the parties: the parent, student, and teacher, are involved. I've seen students succeed exceptionally with the parent's involvement. I believe parents must be equally involved as the student and the teacher" (Interview, December 16, 2022).

Moreover, Tiff supported parental involvement as an essential factor in the success of the Suzuki method. She responded, "[The] Suzuki method has an important component, parental involvement, and parental involvement even changes students' attitudes toward lessons. Parental involvement helped students feel secure with their parents, and students seemed comfortable in their Suzuki method classes due to the musical activities with their parents. The comfortable and safe mindsets were connected to mental stability and peace of mind" (Interview, November 22, 2022).

Lastly, Lily also agreed that parental involvement positively affected her students' progress. Even though the Suzuki method is focused on string instruments, she also advocated its

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<sup>11</sup> Joy interview.

use with parental participation for her piano students. Lily stated the following: “[The] Suzuki method for piano lessons also encourages parents’ involvement. This would undoubtedly help students’ mental stability when children start music lessons at the beginning” (Interview, December 27, 2022).

Students with anxiety, nervousness, or lack of focus need extra support from their parents. Before parental involvement was common in educational environments, the Suzuki method guided parents to aid their children by learning to play musical instruments together with them. Through musical performances, students can have nonverbal communication and interaction with their parents, and the Suzuki method drew a guideline to initiate parental involvement in music education. Moreover, students with developmental delays attained benefits through parental involvement in Suzuki classes.

### **Encouragement With a Positive Mindset**

All six participants agreed with the hypothesized relationship between encouragement with a positive mindset and children’s development in the Suzuki method. All the participants had experienced teaching students with developmental delays, including autism, ADHD, or learning disabilities. However, they approached teaching with the Suzuki method as a part of nurturing students, which boosted their self-esteem and confidence.

Offering an example of the benefits of Suzuki’s characteristics, encouragement with a positive mind, Braden mentioned the following: “I have taught a few students with developmental delays. One of them went on to become my most successful student. Students often can become distracted by their surroundings because they will have many things going on in their heads simultaneously. When I applied the Suzuki method to those students, I celebrated every chance I got from them, even for the smallest of successes, as the Suzuki method of

nurturing students. Graduating with a new instrument, celebrating having new equipment, and going to the violin shop with my students were part of the constructive growth for my students. Change can be good, which is a huge lesson.”<sup>12</sup>

Lily, a Suzuki specialist, advocated ESSA in relation to the ECC program of the Suzuki method. Lily addressed the following: “[R]egarding the Every Child Can (ECC) program from the Suzuki Association of the Americas, the Suzuki method enhances young children’s CD. This program enhances cognitive programs for children and disabled children, including ADHD, autism, and depression.”<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Tiff stressed that mental stability is vital for children to grow positively. She believed that the Suzuki method improves students’ mental stability. She stated, “[C]omfortable and safe mindsets were connected to mental stability and peace of mind. Also, the group play time during Suzuki’s class helped students have excitement and joy with their peers. I have experience teaching a depressed student, but after the student had group performances during Suzuki classes, his facial expression became brighter than before he had group performance experiences.”<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, stage experience served as a tool of encouragement for May, who has experienced the Suzuki method for over 40 years. May stated that “[M]y students understood what needed to be learned to move on from book to book with the Suzuki method. Hearing

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<sup>12</sup> Braden, interview by author, December 16, 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Lily, interview.

<sup>14</sup> Tiff, interview.

fellow students at recitals or masterclasses, or simply walking in the lesson before one's own, gives the student the inspiration to keep going and play that piece.”<sup>15</sup>

In addition, May provided her lived teaching experience story from her 20 years of Suzuki method classes. Many of her students, with lack of focus issues, developmental delays, and mental disability, had shown progress in their positive mindset that never came out in their facial expressions when they played musical instruments at the beginning. She ensured that the Suzuki method influenced her students' motivation to learn with a positive mindset.

Lastly, Braden stated that upgrading instruments was one of the effective benefits of encouraging students' motivation. The Suzuki method classes include young children from age three, and these broad age groups require students to upgrade the size of instruments. Some students may be encouraged by teachers, parents, or other influencers who motivate them to move forward in their hard jobs. Still, educational environments or new devices, including musical instruments, encourage others. Choosing their own musical instruments or accessories, such as a music stand, mute, string, or rosin, may change their mood and encourage them to attain a positive mindset to learn things.

### **Playing By Ear**

All participants mentioned the theme of playing by ear, which is a characteristic of the Suzuki method. Regardless of whether it has positive or negative effects, all participants picked playing by ear or listening as the primary teaching technique of the Suzuki method. Many Suzuki specialists would cite another Suzuki technique called the mother tongue method, which is based

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<sup>15</sup> May, interview.

on learning musical instruments with the Suzuki method requiring the same listening process as language acquisition.

Braden interpreted Suzuki's music pieces as having a focus on repetitive musical phrases:

[I]n Suzuki, everything is introduced by ear, so students understand music as an aural language more than a written one, similar to how we understand other languages that require verbal and memorization skills to learn. All CD comes because of a creative and immersive environment. Regarding processing motor skills, most teachers have variations and repetition. I want my students to repeat something a thousand times and never know they're doing so. We do that through a series of challenges and games. If we're approaching it right, the student will leave a lesson, for the most part, feeling like they just came from a half hour of fun and games without realizing that they've been working on detailed and nuanced skills.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, Joy introduced her teaching method as a part of the playing-by-ear component of the Suzuki method. She mentioned that,

Playing by ear and memorizing are so hand in hand that they don't even realize they are memorizing it. For motor processing skills, instead of constantly learning a new piece, the Suzuki method helped my students focus on technique with familiar Suzuki pieces. I will say that the Suzuki method gives students a structured learning method, for example. When I teach pieces, I typically pull out the most challenging two to three spots and teach them step-by-step. Kids like puzzles, but no puzzles are too challenging. Approaching difficult things in small bite-sized pieces helps. The same can be applied to their schoolwork, which helps to build intelligence.<sup>17</sup>

Tom, a Suzuki piano instructor, used the Suzuki method to improve his students' listening skills. He believed that the Suzuki method aids students in easily memorizing extremely long pieces through listening skills. He stated the following: "Suzuki method helps young students' verbal skills since Suzuki's method for piano also focuses on listening [rather] than notating."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Braden, interview.

<sup>17</sup> Joy, interview.

<sup>18</sup> Tom, interview.



## Group Play

Even though piano group play may be challenging to organize, Suzuki piano teachers give their students many chances for group performance through Suzuki organizations. All the Suzuki specialists indicated that group play in Suzuki organizations allowed students to experience social skills, collaborative work, and motivation.

As a Suzuki piano instructor, Tom stated the following: “Piano with [the] Suzuki method also provides the group performance so that they can learn collaboration in music which might enhance social skills for sure.”<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, Suzuki violin instructor Joy stated, “Suzuki group class helps tremendously with social skills as it forces students to work with a much larger group to sound like one violin sound.”<sup>20</sup> Making musical sounds unified in an orchestra may not be possible for young children. However, the core meaning of an orchestra playing like one violinist was that students learn considerate play and the effort to listen to others’ sounds. Joy knew that children would be willing to listen to others if she insisted that her students play like one musician.

Furthermore, Suzuki violin teacher Braden explained his teaching approach with Suzuki’s group plays as a peer-to-peer learning tool: “Students don’t just have a private lesson once a week; they also have a group lesson with their peers. This is valuable to a child because they begin to learn participation and enthusiasm and each other’s performance strengths.”<sup>21</sup>

Joy shared her teaching experience with her student, Lauren, who was not interested in playing music. She had lethargy and no energy to do any academic work due to her school issue

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<sup>19</sup> Tom, interview.

<sup>20</sup> Joy, interview.

<sup>21</sup> Braden, interview.

of being a bully. Her parents wanted her to learn a musical instrument to play to overcome her depression. She tried to learn the piano as her first musical instrument but was unhappy. However, she enjoyed playing violin in a group and contributing her musical performance to the ensemble members. She learned how to make friends by playing music in a group, enhancing her collaborative and social skills. Even though her musical performance level is not advanced enough to play in a decent orchestra, she was able to experience group play through the Suzuki method. She overcame her depression and lethargy through her peers who have similar musical performance levels as her in Suzuki's group play classes.

Lastly, Tom explained piano group plays through the Suzuki method classes. The traditional method does not provide group play for pianists. However, many young pianists enhanced their interpretation of accompanying skills in music which require social skills, respect for other musicians, and interaction with chamber ensemble music partners with whom they play instruments.

### **Fine Muscle Development**

Fine muscle development is one of the most critical factors that explains the Suzuki method's benefits. All six participants mentioned that playing Suzuki music pieces using fine muscles directly enhances children's CD and PD. Three participants even demonstrated their posture while playing instruments to indicate how students use their fine muscles while performing music pieces that involve repetitive variation.

Suzuki violin teacher Braden stated the following: "I think Suzuki's method teaches the skills by using the repertoires in Suzuki's books that come with learning posture, tone, intonation, and musicality. Also, in my opinion, left-hand articulation is slightly subjective, but I

teach using the inside corners of the fingers in the left hand based on the Suzuki book's instruction."<sup>22</sup>

Instead of Suzuki's repetitive musical pieces, Joy stressed the importance of the specific posture taught by the Suzuki method. She said,

We can focus on how to hold the violin, which gives us much time to learn how to hold the violin and bow appropriately. Suzuki's method of teaching bowing before and after the lesson benefits performance. I think how the Suzuki repertoire is structured lends itself to gradually introducing the left-hand and right-hand skills. For example, in [Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star], you can teach stacking fingers, then in the repertoire, lightly row, you start teaching independent fingers with the 2nd finger. I believe the Suzuki books were designed to be a one-stop shop for all beginners' needs.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, Suzuki piano instructor Tom mentioned that the piano teaching method in Suzuki has a specific posture that provides fine muscle development for young students. He stated, "[T]he Suzuki method gives students sit-up straight and relaxed body posture instruction. When students are intense on their bodies, teachers can follow the Suzuki instruction for posture and performance techniques."<sup>24</sup> Even though relaxing body parts is essential to play any musical instrument, the Suzuki method provides detailed instructions by adding photos of postures in Suzuki books.

In addition, Tiff, a Suzuki specialist in string instruments, explained that the Suzuki method is an excellent example of multi-sensory brain development. She stated,

Suzuki's method is focused on listening and repetition. Therefore, it allows students to experience "multi-sensory brain development." Students can benefit from language acquisition by listening to repetitive melodies in Suzuki's books. Regarding memorization skills, students can also benefit from the Suzuki method since the specialty of Suzuki's pieces is the repetitive melody. If students can memorize music with repetitive songs, students will have a positive impact on music memorization. Also, the

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<sup>22</sup> Braden, interview.

<sup>23</sup> Joy, interview.

<sup>24</sup> Tom, interview.

Suzuki method requires the ability to refine music sounds that students play with using their fine muscles, fingers, and sophisticated body parts will help the progress of students' processing speed. [The] Suzuki method describes several appropriate performance postures, even bow grips for string players, and it only requires one way to learn music performance posture. This open-minded pedagogy for body postures encourages students to try various postures, which leads students to use fine muscles.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, Suzuki violin teacher May explained that the Suzuki method improves students' fine muscle development. She mentioned the following: "Learning to play the violin using the Suzuki method enables students to isolate muscles, finger patterns, arms, head, shoulder, stomach, and feet in such a way that gives students a sense of their body parts that young kids aren't aware of. Balancing a violin on your collarbone, under your jaw, with the weight of your head is a particular way of using your body, enabling students to think about body parts in a way that most of us don't think about."<sup>26</sup> In addition, Joy addressed that most fine muscle development is related to children's PD. As she made her students warm up their fingers by playing various rhythm patterns from Suzuki books, her students improved their left-hand technique and finger strength, which connected to children's PD. The Suzuki books introduce many variations in music, and these Suzuki variations of music pieces stimulate children's fine muscles as part of physical enhancement.

### **Credibility**

Credibility was demonstrated by clarifying the bias throughout the interview process, culminating in creation of in-depth interview transcripts.<sup>27</sup> Member checking was employed by

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<sup>25</sup> Tiff, interview.

<sup>26</sup> May, interview.

<sup>27</sup> Eddles-Hirsch, "Phenomenology and Educational Research," 254.

confirming the final interview data with participants after the transcribed interview responses.<sup>28</sup> This data confirmation process enhanced the accuracy of the interview responses from participants. Lastly, two portions of data from the different interview groups according to years of experience enhanced the credibility of this research.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings.<sup>29</sup> To use a detailed, deep description to convey the research findings, interview participants must have over five years of Suzuki method experience. The entire description provided detailed research findings regarding the overall educational benefits of learning to play a musical instrument using the Suzuki method, which may extend to other music education studies.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is demonstrated through assurances of the research findings. Thus, despite any changes within the research setting or replicated research during the data collection, the dependability of the final data can be ensured.<sup>30</sup> Since the data were collected from participants who had long-term and repeated observations of students in Suzuki method classes, the data attained dependability. Moreover, the researcher audio recorded and transcribed the interviews

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<sup>28</sup> Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 274.

<sup>29</sup> William Trochim, "Qualitative Validity," accessed April 25, 2023, <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/qualval.php>.

<sup>30</sup> Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 290.

using the software coding program, *Delve*. Lastly, the researcher requested that the interviewees confirm their responses to ensure accuracy and dependability.<sup>31</sup>

### **Confirmability**

To avoid bias and create confirmability, Appendix F describes the responses to the focus group interview questions based on the participants' personal experiences and opinions regarding the Suzuki method. Epoché enhanced unbiased data analysis and allowed excluding prejudgments during the interview process. Therefore, confirmability assures the researcher's unbiased data analysis in the research findings.

### **Illustration of the Data Analysis**

Prior to Horizontalization for phenomenological reduction, the entire interview transcripts were confirmed by participants. The researcher asked the participants to check the interview data, which assisted in collecting accurate data for the analysis. A data reduction process was performed through repetitive coding between the regular interview group and the focused group to implement horizontalization.<sup>32</sup> The researcher removed the typical Suzuki method information from the previous experience to eliminate biases or stereotypes. In addition to eliminating her experience with the Suzuki method, the researcher created documentation, Appendix F, and applied epoché by bracketing her personal judgment.

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<sup>31</sup> Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 69.

<sup>32</sup> Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation*, 88.

## Summary

This chapter presented the research results from the data from six participant interviews. Three participants responded to interview questions and possessed over five years of Suzuki teaching experience. The other three participants in the focus group had more than ten years of Suzuki teaching experience. After the participants responded to six interview questions, the researcher recorded their responses with their permission and transcribed the interview data using *Delve*. Then, the researcher researched themes that emerged from the research data and found the following five: (1) parental involvement; (2) encouragement with a positive mindset; (3) playing by ear; (4) group play; and (5) fine muscle development. Most participants responded that parental involvement was the most supportive keyword of the Suzuki method for children's CD and PD as the benefit of the Suzuki method. In addition, many of the participants also responded that playing by ear, group play, fine muscle development, and a positive mindset are the factors that enhance children's CD and PD through the Suzuki method. However, one participant mentioned that the Suzuki method may not directly benefit children's CD and PD. The participant indicated that learning to play a musical instrument may influence children's CD and PD, and learning a musical instrument under any music pedagogy other than the Suzuki method could benefit young students. The researcher confirmed the interview responses from participants to increase the research's credibility, accountability, and dependability. Furthermore, the description of the focus group interview responses enhanced confirmability since the researcher revealed personal experiences and opinions about the Suzuki method through epoché and the bracketing of personal beliefs and experiences. After describing the five themes with participants' narrative answers, answers were found for the research questions, supported by interview quotations.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

This chapter reviews and addresses the study findings, procedures, recommendations for future research, implications, and conclusions. Further, the chapter incorporates and clarifies interviewee responses. The research findings have shown the connectivity between the Suzuki method and children's cognitive development (CD). Also, some of the participants insisted that the Suzuki method may influence children's physical development (PD). All participants agreed that the Suzuki method provides instruction for memorizing musical pieces, finger strength through repetitive left-hand technique guidance, mental stability, and a positive mindset through parental involvement and group performance opportunities. These answers from lived experience suggest that the Suzuki method presents certain benefits to children's development or growth, representing children's CD and PD. In addition, this study acquired vital information describing participants' teaching history and experience. Lastly, future research recommendations may guide other researchers to find new information on the Suzuki method, describing various categories of students and learners.

### Conceptual Framework

The definition of the terms children's CD and PD were the core concept of this study. This phenomenological study aimed to discover how the Suzuki method affects young students' development and growth correlated with CD and PD in the Suzuki method's classes. The researcher acknowledged that Suzuki specialists, including Suzuki teachers, Suzuki researchers, or Suzuki committee members, could provide recently updated Suzuki pedagogy information, uncommon knowledge of the Suzuki method, practical usage of the Suzuki method, and Suzuki



instructors' live teaching experience stories that demonstrate their students' progress records with CD and PD.

Another concept of this research was equity in music education. Since the Suzuki method is well-known to bring equity in music education, the teaching stories from present Suzuki instructors observed each student's progress, strength, weakness, growth, and development through music education based on the Suzuki method. According to the article from *the Strad*, children's brains are most open to learning new mental and physical processes when they are very young, and they start learning language promptly, which music educators can apply to music education for each student's learning equity.<sup>1</sup>

Since the Suzuki method focuses on listening and imitating music rather than note reading, musicality, and performance skill, the Suzuki specialists have realistic records of children's CD and PD through the Suzuki instruction. Rather than overestimating the benefits of the Suzuki method without realistic data records from the Suzuki experts, discovering the research data from Suzuki specialists' lived experiences that indicate their students' progress on CD or PD through learning to play musical instruments under Suzuki's philosophy and instruction could provide valuable information to music researchers, educators, parents, musicians, and therapists.

A Suzuki instructor, Teri Einfeldt, insisted that parents should come to lessons, take notes, participate verbally in the assessment process when asked, and become the home practice assistant in the Suzuki method.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, intimate parental involvement could benefit

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<sup>1</sup> *The Strad*, "What is Suzuki? Elements of the global teaching method," September 8, 2021, <https://www.thestrad.com/playing-hub/what-is-suzuki-elements-of-the-global-teaching-method/13614.article>.

<sup>2</sup> *The Strad*, "6 tips."

children's CD and PD based on the Suzuki method classes. All Suzuki specialists shared how to connect with each student and their parents. Moreover, students with special needs might need extra attention from parents while taking Suzuki music classes. The concept of the research findings about the Suzuki method teaching stories that demonstrated the progress of students with special needs can support the hypothesis on the benefits of the Suzuki method, including children's CD and PD.

### **Summary of the Purpose**

The research study was designed to describe Suzuki specialists' lived teaching experience and opinions through online live interviews. Suzuki specialists have experienced the Suzuki method for at least five years. To deliver practical information and lived experience of the Suzuki teaching method, the researcher conducted interviews, which provided the Suzuki specialists' teaching episodes and tips as interview data. The codes of keywords from participants' responses enhanced categorizing of critical resources for the Suzuki method's benefits.

### **Summary of Procedures**

The researcher interviewed six participants who had built their Suzuki teaching careers for over five years. Three participants had over five years of Suzuki teaching experience, while the other three had over ten years of Suzuki teaching experience. Assisted by the qualitative analysis software, *Delve*, the researcher identified five themes through open, axial, and selective coding: parental involvement, encouragement with a positive mindset, playing by ear, group play, and fine muscle development. This study presented answers to the research questions based on the participants' teaching experience of the Suzuki method and five themes in the responses.

## Discussion

This descriptive phenomenological study found that the six Suzuki specialists' stories regarding their experiences of the method addressed its influence on young children's development. Four participants were women, while the other two were men. Furthermore, the regular interview group consisted of three participants who had experience teaching the Suzuki method for over five years. The focus group consisted of three participants with experience teaching the Suzuki method for over ten years. The interviews were digitally recorded to ensure transcription accuracy, and the researcher confirmed the interview responses with the interview participants. Microsoft Teams or Zoom were used to conduct all the interviews, allowing comfortable locations and flexible time zones where participants could share their experiences.

All six participants agreed with the correlation between the Suzuki method and CD with factors of a positive mindset, nurturing strategy, encouragement, and parental involvement. Five of the participants mentioned fine muscle development as a part of children's PD through the Suzuki method. For example, one participant, Tiff, stated the following:

Learning to play the violin using the Suzuki method enables students to isolate muscles, finger patterns, arms, head, shoulder, even stomach, and feet in such a way that gives students a sense of their body parts that young kids aren't aware of. Balancing a violin on your collarbone, under your jaw, with the weight of your head is a very specific way of using your body, enabling the student to think about body parts in a way that most of us don't think about" (Interview, November 28, 2022).

Another example is that the Suzuki method offers instructions to relax and control body tension, reducing the incidence of physical injuries and muscle pain in routines. Tiff mentioned the following: "[The] Suzuki method does not aid students in avoiding physical injuries and muscle pain. However, students learn to relax and reduce body tension while they play musical

instruments. It means that they learn to relax their body under their mental control, which can reduce the incidence of injuries and muscle pain in their routine.”<sup>3</sup>

The answers to interview questions from participants addressed various challenges of the Suzuki method that they faced, which was supported by their lived experience and teaching stories. Five interview participants had experience teaching students with disabilities or developmental delays. All five participants mentioned that the Suzuki method enhanced CD and PD for students with mental or physical difficulties after they taught musical instruments with the Suzuki method for over a year. These students have gradually progressed in memorizing Suzuki musical pieces, academic focus, left-hand finger usage frequency, and note reading.

Lastly, all six participants responded that the Suzuki method influences young children in both ways, negatively and positively. Even though not all participants commented only positive Suzuki method’s factors, all participants agreed with the Suzuki method’s instructions that benefit children’s development. Only one participant, Lily, mentioned that both the Suzuki method and traditional music pedagogy may influence children’s CD and PD. She was unsure that the Suzuki method directly enhanced children’s CD and PD.

Among five themes from research data codes, parental involvement was the most supportive keyword from six participants. All six participants responded that they had substantial communication with parents before they started teaching musical instruments to their children. Furthermore, most parents learn how to play musical instruments with their children in Suzuki classes. This intimate connection between parents and Suzuki teachers led children to be involved in their learning environment, providing maximum learning outcomes for young children and lower-grade students in elementary schools.

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<sup>3</sup> Tiff, interview.

Lastly, encouragement with a positive mindset supported the student group with learning disabilities, developmental delays, and special needs. Even though music learning itself benefits students with learning disabilities, Suzuki's philosophy influenced every child to access the opportunity of music education under the encouragement with a positive mindset. Suzuki instructor, Joy's student, who avoided learning musical instruments, became a leader of group play in Suzuki classes.

### Research Question Responses

This research sought to answer the following central research question and sub-research questions:

**Central RQ:** How do Suzuki specialists describe their lived teaching experiences?

**SQ1.** How do Suzuki specialists describe their experiences of teaching elements related to PD?

**SQ2.** How do Suzuki specialists describe their experiences of teaching elements related to CD?

#### Central Research Question

How do Suzuki specialists describe their lived teaching experiences? The Suzuki specialists believed that the Suzuki method has positive effects on children. Even though several Suzuki specialists used the method alongside other teaching methods, most agreed that the Suzuki method influences children's growth and development. Tiff stated the following: "[The] Suzuki method has nurtured the music education mind and teaching with "love" to children. The warm-hearted and nurtured pedagogy may touch parents' and children's hearts."<sup>4</sup> Tiff

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<sup>4</sup> Tiff, interview.

approached the Suzuki method as a tool to stimulate students' motivation with less academic pressure. Many Suzuki teachers have taken Suzuki seminar classes or training courses, and they also acquired updated information on the Suzuki pedagogy that led Suzuki teachers to instruct young students efficiently with the love education from Suzuki's philosophy. After Tiff applied the updated teaching method from the Suzuki seminar, her students, who used to have fears on the stage, started to enjoy the musical performance on the stage. The love education from the Suzuki method affects young students' confidence which comes from their mental stability and physical health.

Furthermore, Joy approached the Suzuki method to benefit communication. She stated, "[The] Suzuki method can be a framework for discussing parent/ child communication methods. Also, [The] Suzuki method can be a framework for managing big childhood feelings such as self-confidence, jealousy, competition, perseverance, and comfortability."<sup>5</sup> One thing that Joy experienced with teaching a special needs student was that parents even shared their kid's favorite colors, foods, characters, movies, and toys. Through more than enough information about the student with special needs, she could acquire the student's attention and move to the next stage of learning and playing advanced music pieces from the Suzuki book series. Joy shared that the student with special needs became a decent violinist who played orchestra music in a local youth orchestra as a concertmaster.

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<sup>5</sup> Joy, interview.

## Suzuki Specialists' Interview Content

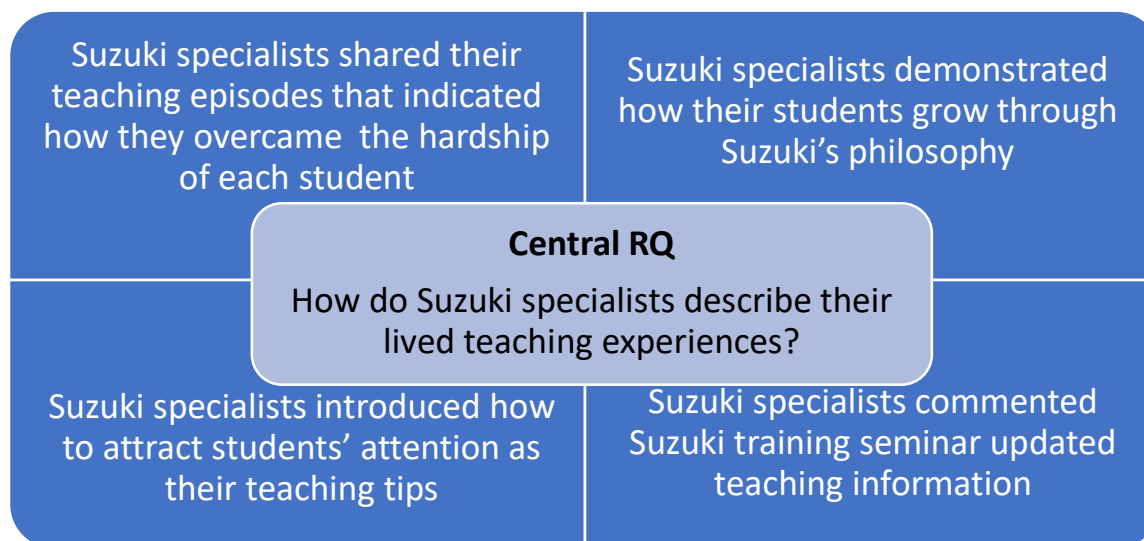


Figure 1. Suzuki Specialists' Lived Teaching Experiences

The Suzuki specialists responded to interview questions and participated in focus groups to provide significant feedback on teaching experiences. To find the answer to the Central RQ, Suzuki specialists addressed the four elements: 1) Teaching episodes, 2) Opinions about Suzuki's philosophy for children's development and growth, 3) Teaching tips, 4) Updated Suzuki training information.

#### Sub-Research Question 1

How do Suzuki specialists describe their experiences teaching elements related to physical development (PD)? Even though most of the Suzuki specialists' answers were not directly related to the Suzuki method for PD, all of them agreed with the concept of body balance through the Suzuki method. Tiff stated the following: "Suzuki method requires the ability to refine music sounds that students play with using their fine muscles, fingers, and sophisticated

body parts.”<sup>6</sup> Though playing musical instruments requires fine muscle movement, finger training, and a relaxing body, the Suzuki method provides accurate instructions on how to relax the body. In contrast, students play musical instruments, and the pictures of music players introduce body posture guidelines. Since Suzuki knew the balance of the body enhances the quality of musical sounds and performance techniques, Tiff utilized Suzuki’s instructions and guidelines for students’ performance postures.

Moreover, the Suzuki method of piano performance requires a relaxed body with body balance. Tom mentioned, “[The] Suzuki method gives students sit-up straight and relaxed body posture instruction. When students are intense on their bodies, teachers can follow the Suzuki instruction for posture and performance techniques.”<sup>7</sup> To enhance PD, students may need to use fine muscles frequently, and relaxing the body with the Suzuki posture also provides a balance of the body, which is connected to PD. Tom said that not only does the Suzuki method require a relaxing body for music performance, but he also addressed that it provides detailed instructions on how to use and relax their fingers by showing pictures of pianists’ fingers. Therefore, the detailed performance posture, balancing body, and strengthening finger instructions may answer the connection between the Suzuki method and children’s PD.

Children’s PD may not directly have a connection with the Suzuki method. However, Joy insisted that playing by listening with their ears would be a part of PD. She addressed the finger reaction with students’ listening as multi-sensory PD, and Suzuki teachers encourage students to copy their postures and sounds, which require many processes in their physical body parts, including fingers, ears, brains, and even heartbeats. Even though the benefit that children get on

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<sup>6</sup> Tiff, interview.

<sup>7</sup> Tom, interview.



their PD through the Suzuki method may be minor compared to learning extreme sports, she still supported that it enhances children's PD.

### Suzuki Method with Physical Development

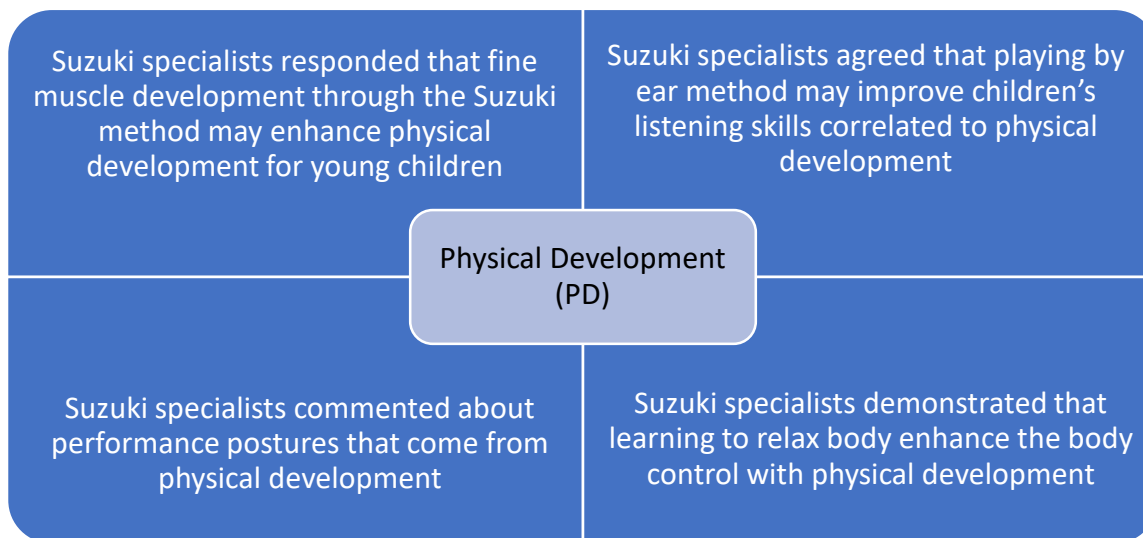


Figure 2. Suzuki Specialists' View on Physical Development

The Suzuki specialists originated the idea of connectivity between the Suzuki method and children's physical development (PD). They insisted that fine muscle development through finger technique guidelines in Suzuki books, ear training, performance posture instruction, and relaxing body are primary elements to demonstrate children's PD in the Suzuki method. Most Suzuki specialists commented that students, parents, and Suzuki instructors could understand the appropriate performance postures to enhance the musical sound, tone, and performance technique by viewing Suzuki books' detailed photos. Listening leads to imitating, brain stimulation, and imagination for students of Suzuki classes, and these effects are related not only to children's PD but also to children's CD.

### Sub-Research Question Two

How do Suzuki specialists describe their experiences of teaching elements related to cognitive development (CD)? Suzuki specialists responded that more data and clues are provided on CD than on PD through the Suzuki method. Tom stated, “It definitely helps young students’ verbal skills since Suzuki’s method for piano also focuses [more] on listening than notating. Piano with [The] Suzuki method also provides the group performance so that they can learn collaboration in music which might enhance social skills for sure.”<sup>8</sup> Tom ensured that listening is the primary factor for children’s music education. Children listen to music using their ears, focus, and patience. In addition, if they mimic what their teachers play, they use their motor skills, collaboration skills, memorization skills, and even rhythmic reaction that appear from their CD.

Moreover, Tiff addressed her experience of seeing CD in her students as follows: “Suzuki’s method is focused on listening and repetition. Therefore, it allows students to experience “multi-sensory brain development.”<sup>9</sup> She explained that she has seen her students gradually display improvements in their memorization skills, motor skills, processing speed, and language acquisition after she taught her students with the Suzuki method. Tiff shared a story that she experienced in her teaching life. She had a student with ADHD, and her student could not focus on her music lesson if it lasted over ten minutes. Tiff started teaching singing to her student with the student’s favorite song since the song attracted the student’s attention at the beginning of the lesson. After singing the song, the student wanted to play her favorite song with

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<sup>8</sup> Tom, interview.

<sup>9</sup> Tiff, interview.

her instrument. Tiff made her lesson successful, and her student played her favorite song with the enthusiasm that came from Suzuki's philosophy.

May recounted a story of a student improving their critical thinking and planning ability which are essential factors of CD. She stated the following: "I believe that cognitive development requires students to be a part of their planning so that the child is required to "think" about what is being learned and how they will play music pieces within the Suzuki method."<sup>10</sup> Students have many musical ideas from their routines, memories, or experiences. Suzuki's philosophy respected each student's thinking, idea, and imagination. May mentioned that her students play Suzuki book's music pieces differently every day depending on their moods, body conditions, and times. She mentioned that the music performance, tone, or sound difference indicates students' growth or development, including their CD.

Lastly, Tiff shared her teaching tips to enhance children's CD through the Suzuki method. Since all Suzuki pieces in Suzuki books have repetitive rhythms and melodies, she attempted to have students discover the musical patterns required to learn music composition. Instead of explaining music composition rules or formations, students can learn music composition by understanding musical patterns in a Suzuki piece, and understanding patterns could be one of the primary academic activities for children's CD.

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<sup>10</sup> May, interview.

### Suzuki method with Cognitive Development

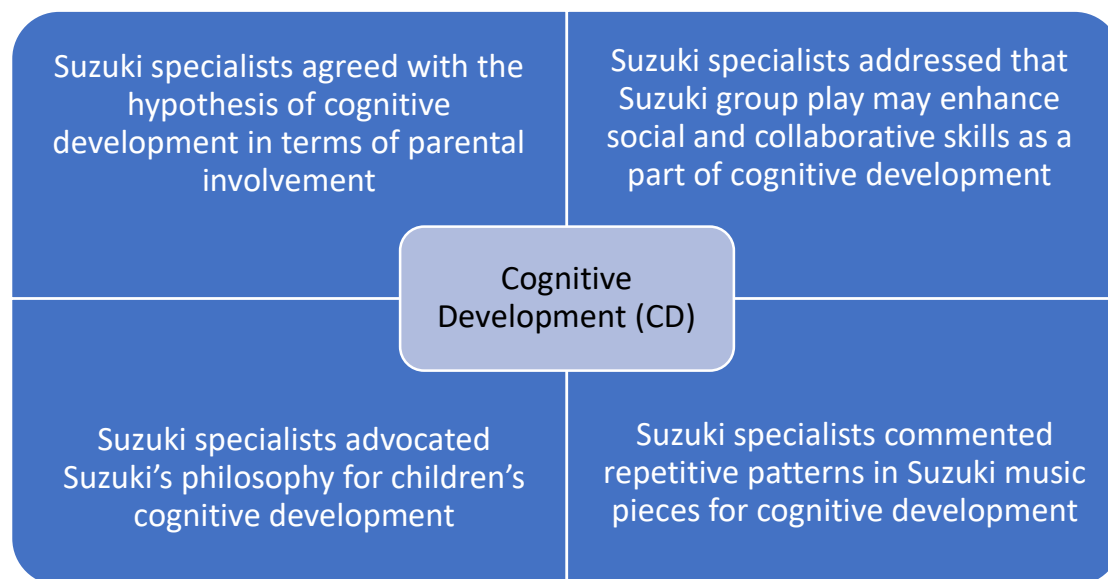


Figure 2. Suzuki Specialists' View on Cognitive Development

The Suzuki specialists originated the idea of connectivity between the Suzuki method and children's cognitive development (CD). Since CD includes memorization skills, intelligence, motor skills, emotional capacity, collaborative skills, and social skills, the meaning of CD could be various. Therefore, the Suzuki specialists indicated that stable mental health through parental involvement, Suzuki's philosophy for a positive mindset, repetitive patterns in Suzuki music pieces in Suzuki books, and group play for collaborative skills are critical elements for children's CD under the Suzuki method.

### Implications

This study addresses some Suzuki experts' teaching stories, which may provide implications and educational information for music educators, parents, students, and researchers. The interview data may provide critical implications for parents, educators, and musicians with curiosity, questions, or enthusiasm for hearing stories about Suzuki teaching from Suzuki

experts. Students, parents, or educators who have not experienced the Suzuki method in instrumental music pedagogies may acquire knowledge of Suzuki classes by reading Suzuki experts' stories with a summary of Suzuki's philosophy.

Furthermore, many researchers, parents, and educators may seek detailed information about the Suzuki method and its benefits for student development. The data obtained through this research may provide the resources for enhancing students' CD and PD. Suzuki experts who have taught young students for over five to ten years using the Suzuki method can suggest valuable and practical teaching tips and information for broadening the learning aspects for young students. In addition, Suzuki instructors who have taught musical instruments to students with developmental delays or special needs may share their experiences to contribute to the equity of music education so that they spread the positive effect of learning music in low-income communities or to academically disadvantaged students.

### **Limitations**

This research attained lived experience of the Suzuki method through six participants who have experience teaching children musical instruments with Suzuki instructions. Each interviewee shared his or her lived experiences of the Suzuki method while they taught children to play musical instruments with the Suzuki method. All interviewees mentioned how the Suzuki method influenced children's development in music play that requires repetitive melody memorization, understanding rhythmic patterns, consistent focus, collaborative skills, and balancing each body part. However, the study did not include the accurate age ranges of children the interviewees taught in their lived teaching stories. Also, the Suzuki method may influence older and upper grades students' musical performance progress or academic improvement connected to their CD and PD. However, this research found no data about teens' CD or PD

through the Suzuki method. Lastly, the research data could have included students' race, ethnicity, and gender to compare the research results, and the absence of students' race, ethnicity, and gender was the limitation of the study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was limited to only investigating young students who attended preschool or elementary school through Suzuki teachers' stories of their lived experiences. Considering the research findings, limited participants, and observation of only young students' development, researchers should continue researching older students, including middle and high school students who learn music through the Suzuki method. Future research about these students' benefits obtained through the Suzuki method may provide comprehensive advice to apply in music education.

Another recommendation for future research would be to introduce the influence of Suzuki-trained students with information on race, ethnicity, and gender. According to Abby Butler's article, music educators need to know about their students' musical backgrounds, learning style preferences, and racial identity, which interact with race and culture to affect music learning.<sup>11</sup> Based on understanding students' race and ethnicity, which come from cultural backgrounds, educators may maximize the Suzuki method's educational benefits for their diverse students.

Lastly, future research on comparing musical happiness levels between Suzuki-trained students and other musical pedagogies- trained students may distribute informative advice to

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<sup>11</sup> Abby Butler, Vicki R. Lind, and Constance L. McKoy, "Equity and access in music education: conceptualizing culture as barriers to and supports for music learning," *Music Education Research* Vol. 9, No. 2 (July 2007): 245.

students who have no experience in music education. Many non-musicians or students have had no opportunity to learn musical instruments in low-income communities or academically disadvantaged schools. To remind Suzuki's philosophy, including academic equity, future research on accurate feedback of various musical pedagogies would be necessary. Considering that not all musical-trained students become professional musicians, research data that indicates the mental happiness or relieving stress level of diverse music pedagogies may encourage disadvantaged students to approach music education.

### **Conclusions**

The Suzuki method focuses on children's innate musical talent. Suzuki's philosophy encourages children to play musical instruments as they naturally learn languages. This phenomenological study aimed to share Suzuki specialists' lived experiences of teaching children musical instruments through the Suzuki method. The research findings indicated a need for children's cognitive and physical development, which Suzuki specialists can support through the Suzuki method. Six Suzuki specialists shared their experiences and teaching tips through individual and group interviews. All indicated that the Suzuki method influenced children's finger strengths, control of body parts, musical memorization, and focus in class. However, not all Suzuki specialists agreed that the method benefits the CD and PD of children. Even though Suzuki's philosophy provides a nurturing and positive attitude for children's music education, one Suzuki specialist responded that Suzuki's philosophy does not provide direct benefits for children's CD and PD. Collectively, Suzuki specialists contributed to the development of five key themes: (1) parental involvement; (2) encouragement with a positive mind; (3) play by ear; (4) group play; and (5) fine muscle development. Most Suzuki specialists felt that the Suzuki method fosters development in musical ability while contributing to children's CD and PD.

Suzuki specialists also shared valuable experiences teaching students with special needs and stories of applying unique approaches to allow intimate interactions. While additional research is necessary to replicate these preliminary findings, this study addresses Suzuki specialists' scholarly opinions and the importance of maximizing educational benefits through the Suzuki method for music educators, pedagogy, researchers, musicians, and early childhood educators.

### **Summary**

All six participants agreed that a connection exists between the Suzuki method and CD based on a positive mindset, nurturing strategy, encouragement, and parental involvement. However, not all participants responded that the Suzuki method provides direct educational benefits with CD and PD. Most participants agreed that the Suzuki method influences children's growth and development, and some participants experienced teaching students with special needs who may attain inferior CD and PD. Participants shared teaching stories addressing students' rapid progress on focus, patience, following instructions, memorization of music pieces, and collaborative skills resulting from Suzuki's principled instruction. These accounts provided excellent research data related to children's CD and PD. Even though one participant was unsure whether the Suzuki method enhances children's CD and PD or if children simply develop naturally as they learn to play a musical instrument, the participant still agreed that students' musical performance progresses in Suzuki classes.

This phenomenological study aimed to explore Suzuki specialists' lived experiences and views concerning the CD and PD of children participating in Suzuki instruction. Additional research is necessary to explore the benefits of the Suzuki method, which may reveal extended educational benefits for various age groups of learners. In addition, future research on the connection between the Suzuki method and children's cultural backgrounds, which come from



their race and ethnicity, would extend current findings and be a valuable asset to the existing research literature.

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## APPENDIX A: IRB Exemption Letter

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# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 27, 2022

Hyecheon Kim  
Brian Stiffler

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-943 The Benefits of the Suzuki Method on Children's Cognitive and Physical Development: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study of Suzuki Specialist.

Dear Hyecheon Kim, Brian Stiffler,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46.104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB.** Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**Research Ethics Office**



## APPENDIX B: Recruitment Letter (Interview)

Dear Suzuki Association of the Americas' teachers, researchers, and board members,

As a graduate student in the School of Music at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate degree. My research aims to give teaching resources to Suzuki teachers for the development of children, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.


Participants must be 18 years of age or older, teaching the Suzuki method for over five years. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an interview online via Zoom. Participants will be asked to take part in an interview or a focus group. It should take approximately 30 minutes to complete the interview. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

Please click [here](#) to provide consent to participate in the study. I will contact you if you agree to participate in scheduling an interview. Thank you for your consideration and assistance.

Sincerely,

Diana Hyeyeon Kim

Doctoral Candidate -School of Music, Liberty University



## **APPENDIX C: Consent (Interview)**

**Title of the Project:** The Benefits of the Suzuki Method on Children’s Cognitive and Physical Development: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study of Suzuki Specialists.

**Principal Investigator:** Diana Hyeyeon Kim, Doctoral Candidate -School of Music, Liberty University

**Faculty Sponsor:** Brian Stiffler, School of Music, Liberty University

### **Invitation to be part of a Research Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding the lived experiences of teaching the Suzuki method in the United States. To participate, you must be 18 or older, and participants must also have five or more years of teaching experience in the Suzuki method in the United States. Please read this entire form before deciding whether to participate in the interview for this research project. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

### **What is the study about, and why is it being done?**

The study aims to explore Suzuki specialists’ lived experiences in the context of Suzuki’s effect on children’s development. These experiences provide practical information on the Suzuki method’s benefit to music educators and researchers.

### **What will happen if you take part in this study?**

If you agree to participate in this study:

You will take part in an individual interview approximately 30 minutes in length. The interview will be recorded and transcribed.

You may be invited to participate in an optional focus group session following the interview (one 30-minute session). The focus group session will be recorded and transcribed.

### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from participating in this study. Both the researcher and participants can benefit from this study because it provides crucial evidence of the Suzuki effect that Suzuki teachers face in teaching children’s development, along with the lived experiences of Suzuki specialists in the United States. Thus, the benefits are gaining knowledge from first-hand experiences, helpful tips, and solutions to serve young students better.

### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private, and published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher can access the data/documents. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential.
- The researcher will replace the name of each participant with a pseudonym to protect their identity and provide anonymity and confidentiality.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

### **How will you be compensated for being part of the study?**

Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. Once the study has concluded, each participant who completes all aspects of the study will receive a gift card to Amazon in the amount of \$25.

### **Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision on whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### **What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

### **Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**

The researcher conducting this study is Diana Hyeyeon Kim. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Brian Stiffler, at [REDACTED].

### **Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations.*

*The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researchers, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

**Your Consent**

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records, and the researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

- I consent to participate in the study
- I do not consent to participate in the study

### **APPENDIX D: Interview Questions**

1. How do you approach the Suzuki method with your students to obtain maximum educational benefits?
2. What factors of the Suzuki method make students experience cognitive development, including growth in their memorization skills, motor processing speed, intelligence, social skills, and verbal skills?
3. Have you taught music using the Suzuki method to students with developmental delays such as Autism? If yes, would you share the story of that experience?
4. Would you describe how you've seen the Suzuki method influence children's constructive growth, including physical development?
5. How does the Suzuki method approach the pedagogical bow technique, left-hand articulation, and performance posture?
6. How do you answer parents when they complain about the lack of note-reading and the robotic style of playing?

### **APPENDIX E: Focus Group Questions**

1. How does the Suzuki method enhance the overall cognitive development of young students, including memorization skills, motor skills, intelligence, processing speed, and language acquisition?
2. How does the Suzuki method support young students' mental stability and peace of mind?
3. How does the Suzuki method enhance the overall physical development of young students?
4. What is the Suzuki posture instruction that helps young students avoid physical injuries and muscle pain?
5. In your opinion, what factors of the Suzuki method make it popular among parents, educators, and students?
6. What do you believe is key to maximizing the benefit of the Suzuki method for young students' development?

## APPENDIX F: Epoché

1. How does the Suzuki method enhance the overall cognitive development of young students, including memorization skills, motor skills, intelligence, processing speed, and language acquisition?

Since the mother tongue method is related to language acquisition, the Suzuki method may enhance the language acquisition ability of young students. Besides language acquisition, no one can guarantee overall cognitive development just because of learning instruments with the Suzuki method.

2. How does the Suzuki method support young students' mental stability and peace of mind?

I remember feeling relief when I started to learn to play violin with my mom at the age of five since my mom was next to me and supported my violin lesson, the learning environment was like a sweet home that could give me mental stability and a peaceful mind.

3. How does the Suzuki method enhance the overall physical development of young students?

Even though learning string instruments requires fine muscle exercises, the physical development of Suzuki method has yet to be proved scientifically.

4. What is the Suzuki posture instruction that helps young students avoid physical injuries and muscle pain?

Suzuki method introduced playing instruments with full of body relaxation, and a relaxed body is essential for learning any instrument, even with traditional pedagogy. As a result, I do not agree with the idea that Suzuki's posture instruction helps avoid physical injuries and muscle pain.

5. In your opinion, what factors of the Suzuki method make it popular among parents, educators, and students?

Suzuki method approaches music education with nurturing and loving children that give ethical value in modern society. As modern society has been complex and busy with technology and digital or AI teaching methods, young students cannot have a human touch from their teachers. Since Suzuki experienced teachers try to implement the Suzuki method with empathy and sympathy to their students based on Suzuki's motto, *Every Child Can*, parents would be willing to chase the Suzuki method for their children.

6. What do you believe is key to maximizing the benefit of the Suzuki method for young students' development?

Learning musical instruments needs huge commitment, patience, and parental support. For young students, those requirements must give them academic pressure and unnecessary stress. If Suzuki method approaches music education with nurturing and encouragement, young students might be willing to experience learning musical instruments. I want to emphasize mental stability and humanity more than physical development from the Suzuki method. Physical illness comes from mental illness, such as insomnia or neurogenic pains. If parents encourage their children to feel the joy of music with group play, students can maximize the benefit of the Suzuki method.