

Part 4:

The Joys and Benefits of Suzuki Group Class

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

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

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

While the question initially asked, "What is the greatest benefit of group class?" many participants also stated that it was hard to choose just one benefit for students participating in Suzuki group instruction.

The following are some selected participant statements regarding the emergent themes (emphasis added).

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

Wow—way too many awesome benefits to name just one!

Social contact, which aids in student retention, opportunity to teach topics such as theory and reading efficiently, development of **ensemble skills** leading to high-level advanced ensembles, modeling of skills among students, opportunity to play for **community** groups.

Another teacher wrote:

The **camaraderie** built between students and between parents. They reinforce what is worked on in private lessons, polishing of ensemble skills, work on bowings and intonation, reinforce technique work and **interactions** provide an opportunity to work with other string players.

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

To be a part of a whole which exceeds the sum of the parts.

One young boy after his first group told his mother, I felt like I was playing in an orchestra! The adults, too, express delight to be playing in parts.

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

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

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

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

Another teacher described the motivational interactions and expansion of skills:

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

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

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Give yourselves a hand! The Many Benefits of Suzuki Group Class

Organizational News

Here's what SAA leadership and staff are excited about this season!

Expand your skills and enhance your teaching with teacher training courses! **We have added new units**, such as bass, voice, SECE, and trumpet. Many upper level courses are being offered this summer, as well, in flute, recorder, cello, and violin.

Be sure to check out unique offerings such as Practicum and Revisiting Unit One (available for violin, cello, and piano for summer 2016), and non-instrument-specific SPA courses (held in fall 2016 through spring 2017). These are great courses to include in the next workshop you plan, as well!

Want to take one of these courses? **We're proud that more than 60 Suzuki Institutes are being offered this summer across Canada and United States.** Find one near you by consulting ASJ vol. 44 no. 2 or visiting: <http://suzukiassociation.org/events/institutes/>

Our **Chapter Affiliate** program continues to grow by leaps and bounds. Stay tuned to our email newsletter, Short Score, future issues of the ASJ, and the 17th Biennial Conference to learn more about new chapters! If you'd like to become a Chapter Affiliate, visit <https://suzukiassociation.org/teachers/affiliates/> to review the application process.

As the professional membership organization for Suzuki method teaching, we work hard to bring you useful **SAA Member Benefits**, including SmartMusic discounts, Teacher Location Service, and the Online Membership Directory.

MakeMusic, creator of **SmartMusic** and **Finale**, has several new products with the following special discounts to SAA string teachers and parents:

- 20 percent discount on SmartMusic annual educator subscriptions
- 15 percent discount on SmartMusic annual student subscriptions
- 20 percent discount on new Finale Academic purchases or upgrades

Another benefit of an active SAA membership is the option of adding your name to the **Teacher Location Service (TLS)**. This is an elective benefit and teachers may set their public profile to have as much or as little information posted as they wish (i.e., name, phone, location, email, bio, picture, registered training, etc.). Not all SAA members opt to be listed, as its intent is to provide names of teachers wishing to add more students. It differs from the Online Member Directory in that the TLS is viewable by the public, whereas the Member Directory includes all members and is only available to view by other members.

Please note that if your membership lapses, you must sign up for the TLS again, even if you were previously listed. To add your name, log into your SAA web account and go to "Teacher Location Service."

The **Online Member Directory** is a wonderful resource for finding colleagues in your area—either where you live or where you visit! You must be logged in to your SAA website account to access it. From desktop or mobile, search by name or by instrument, city, US state, Canadian province, or other country. Find the Directory at: <https://suzukiassociation.org/people/>

You may have noticed that in recent issues, this volume included, ASJ editors have been **reprinting columns from early issues**. We strongly feel that honoring our roots as a movement as we grow into the future is a valuable practice. We hope that newer

members benefit from the wisdom of our founding members whom they may not have had the chance to get to know.

Finally, while SAA programs rely on the work of the board of directors, committee members, and staff, **the SAA is above all a learning community**. Each and every individual member is important for maintaining the excellence in music education we are known for throughout the world. We do this in part through thoughtful exchange with one another, which is even easier these days with the help of social media. So please—get involved today. Check out our Facebook page. Leave a comment on our posts or share with us what's going on in your corner of the Suzuki world. If you're a writer or blogger who engages with Suzuki-related material and would like to write for the ASJ or our blog, drop us a line at publications@suzukiassociation.org. We hope to hear from you soon! ❧

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

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

Free download!

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

Scenes from SAA Conferences 2008–2014. See ASJ 44#4 for coverage of the 17th Biennial Conference!

