



My First Time at IRSTE: I Will Be Back

By Laura Nerenberg

This past May 2016, I took a chance on attending my first ever International Research Symposium on Talent Education, which took place slightly before and concurrently with the 17th Biennial SAA Conference. This year's was the 13th edition of the IRSTE, which was founded in 1990. A huge thank you goes to co-coordinators Pat D'Ercole and Karin Hendricks for their tireless and enthusiastic leadership.

I have wanted to attend the IRSTE for several years, but was held back by circumstances outside of my control as well as by my own misunderstanding of it—mainly that it was not an event intended for me. I could not have been more wrong. From the outset, an atmosphere of respect, collegiality and excitement reigned.

The format of the IRSTE made it so that there was something for everyone—including delicious food. Research presentations included some in masterclass format with IRSTE and SAA Conference keynote speaker Dr. Aniruddh Patel. Poster sessions included participants from all over North America and even Nigeria. While we were encouraged to read the information on the posters, it was the interactions with the presenters that made the most lasting impact on me. The enthusiasm each showed for his or her research coupled with an openness to discuss their research and experiences made for animated conversations over veggies and cheese.

We all have our own personal areas of interest, and for me, a few talks stood out as most thought-provoking.

Dr. Zachary Ebin's presentation of a pilot study went immediately to the crux of what it means to be a Suzuki teacher—which, when it comes down to it, has more to do with a philosophical than a pedagogical approach. He set out to discover whether a teacher's preconceived belief in the expected performance of a student had an impact on that student's performance outcome. Are we not, as Suzuki teachers, supposed to believe that Every Child Can Learn? How

many of us take the time to consider the ramifications of that belief, or confess, if only to ourselves, that it is possible to falter in that belief. Dr. Ebin admitted his research, with a very small, self-selected sample size, was still preliminary, and was also upfront about some inherent difficulties in conducting research in this area—mainly in gathering a large enough sample size and one that is random, not self-selected. This was a pilot study after all. That said, to be confronted with an examination of one of the most basic tenets of our belief system as Suzuki teachers was highly stimulating, and is something I will likely turn over in my brain for months to come.

Lauretta Werner spoke of a topic once considered taboo among musicians, that of anxiety and stress in performance. As the trainers and coaches of musicians who are expected to perform in public, it is incumbent on us to stay current with the latest research in the field of performance anxiety and the various ways to live with it. From this interesting talk, I retained most notably a series of power stances (these can be found via a quick Google search online). Of these, the "standing-tall-with-hands-on-hips" stance seemed to be the most practical to teach ourselves and our students.

Dr. Aniruddh Patel gave an intriguing keynote: "The Origins and Power of Synchronized Movements to Music." I retained some pertinent take-homes from this talk. Namely, that moving in sync with others influences social behavior and that musical synchrony in particular increases pro-social behaviors. There could not be a more compelling argument for the immense benefit of group classes than this.

Rebecca A. Roesler gave a compelling talk about her research examining problem solving in a professional string quartet. Her meticulous research included statistics on the level of participation of each of the members of the quartet in the various fields that required improvement. What emerged was the image of a mature ensemble, comprised of four equal members, where open

communication was the norm. The practical applications of this research are obvious as I play and often coach chamber music. Understanding the effective work strategies of a successful, professional chamber ensemble is an invaluable teaching and rehearsing tool.

The final talk I personally found very fascinating was the account of a study of a Belgium-based string orchestra that performed entirely from memory. As Suzuki teachers, we understand the value of memorization from the start. The study's author, Jacob M. Dakon, studied the most advanced orchestra of a memorization-based orchestra academy. He concluded that while the effort taken and anxiety produced by memorizing all the music they performed was great, the benefits the memorization yielded were great. Through interviews with the teens themselves and through observation of their training, he discovered that memorization improved their communication skills, allowed them to focus on other aspects of performance, and even stimulated creativity.

Other talks included an analysis of the teaching and training of Suzuki and traditional violin teachers with respect to injury prevention and a review of music and dyslexia. The poster presentations included the following: a study of how children's temperament affects teaching, the persistence of students in Suzuki group classes and related empathy ratings, a report on American and Canadian Suzuki programs, a study of empathy-related character traits in relation to interactive musical play in early childhood, creation of an empathy survey for Suzuki students and their parents, and parental involvement as it relates to musical progress.

My most valuable take-home from the IRSTE, the thing that has made me recommend it to colleagues constantly since this past May, is a bit of a paradox: While we often strive for certainties, I found many of the talks left me with more questions than answers—not questions of misunderstanding, but of a thirst for more research, more knowledge, more

answers and inevitably, more questions, as we continue on our journey as lifelong learners in pedagogy and music. When Pablo Casals (at age 93) was asked why he continued to practice the cello three hours a day, he replied, "I'm beginning to notice some improvement." Surely,

the same can be said of us as pedagogues. The IRSTE is a vital ingredient to the continued renewal of our art and our craft as Suzuki teachers.

To learn more about the work done by the IRSTE, please read one of its articles in the *American Suzuki Journal* from recent

and forthcoming issues. I invite you to learn more about the presentations from the 13th Symposium, some of which I touched on above, by visiting irste.org.



Part 6:

Parent Education in Suzuki Studios: Who offers it? Who receives it? What does it look like?

By Kathleen M. Einarson, Karin S. Hendricks, Nancy Mitchell, Elizabeth M. Guerriero, and Patricia D'Ercole

This is the sixth installment in a series of articles reporting on a large-scale demographic survey of North American Suzuki teachers. The previous article in this series examined some of the perceived challenges of group class. In this article, we will review teachers' descriptions of the parent education offerings within their studios. Teachers were asked to provide information about the structure, content, and intensity of their parent education programs. The survey questions included both initial education for new families entering their studios, as well as ongoing education for returning families.

Within our sample, 75 percent of teachers offered some form of parent education for incoming families. Teachers were able to type open-ended descriptions of their education offerings in the survey, and were given the option to describe as many types of programming as needed (as such, the responses below sum to more than 100 percent). Based on teachers' descriptions, we grouped the responses into categories for different types of experiences. Of the teachers who offered some form of initial parent education, the most common approach was to hold parent meetings or workshops (55 percent). Teachers also

reported distributing reading materials (43 percent), conducting parent education within the private lesson (43 percent), having discussions between the parent and the teacher (25 percent), and having incoming families observe lessons (18 percent).

Although the number of teachers who offered parent education to new families was quite high, the number who offered ongoing parent education to families already in their studios was significantly lower: Only 50 percent of teachers reported offering continuing parent education for returning families, and the majority of those who did reported that these opportunities were "minimal." Although the educational experience for returning families was less comprehensive, the formats teachers reported using were quite similar to those for initial parent education, including meetings or workshops (55 percent), reading materials and online resources like "Parents As Partners Online" (35 percent), conducting parent education within the private lesson (25 percent), or having discussions between parent and teacher (20 percent).

Many teachers who described their initial and ongoing parent education offerings also mentioned that they struggled to find effective strategies and resources for communicating with parents. Since certain parent education resources were mentioned by name frequently (that is, mentioned by 10 or more teachers in our

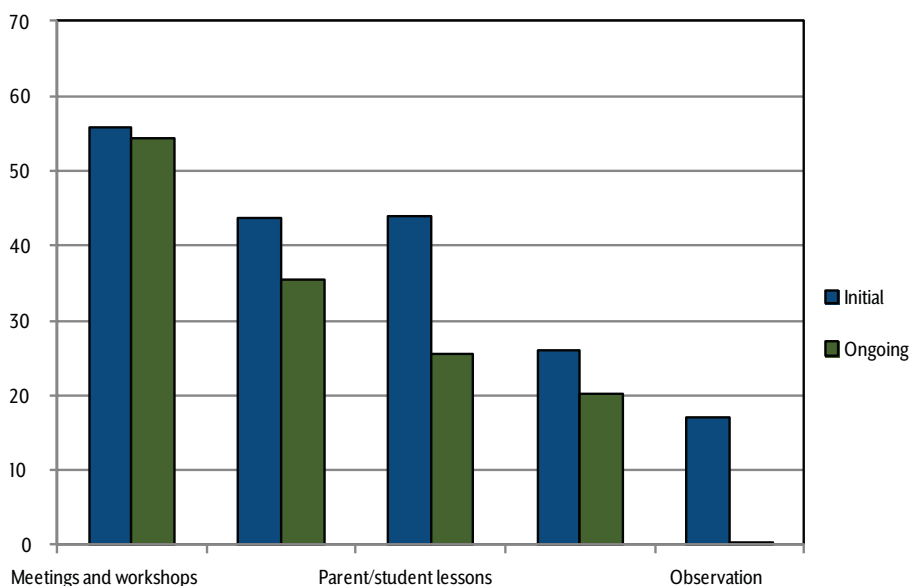


Figure 1: Format of Parent Education

(note: values will not sum to 100)

Continued on p. 26