

A REVIEW OF ESSENTIAL PEDAGOGICAL AND RESEARCH LITERATURE  
ON SUZUKI PIANO

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March, 2010

## ABSTRACT

A brief historical overview of the early formation of Suzuki piano instruction after World War I in Japan is provided at the outset of this article. This is followed by a review of significant pedagogical materials, curriculum development studies, and formal academic research writings with a Suzuki piano focus.

Pivotal figures writing books on teaching Suzuki piano were found to differ widely in approach in areas such as technique, the point at which music reading is introduced, and repertoire. Master's and doctoral students during earlier stages of the development of Suzuki piano often took it upon themselves to interpret the violin method and to address issues such as reading and the lack of variety in the repertoire; some created very rich curricula that are unfortunately not readily available to teachers and researchers. Important historical data such as interviews with Suzuki pioneers were found in rather obscure and neglected studies.

Six additional studies were found that used methods of systematic inquiry in the area of Suzuki piano. These varied widely; subjects included information on what the piano method was like during its beginnings in Japan and the United States, comparing rhythmic aptitude and achievement in Suzuki and traditional studios, summarizing educational philosophy and brain research in support of the Suzuki method, interviews with Suzuki piano teachers and parents of their students to see if principles of the method were being practiced, investigating the potential effectiveness of supplemental left hand recordings of Suzuki piano repertoire, results from a survey of ten prominent Suzuki piano teachers, and an analysis of perceptions from SAA piano teacher trainers.

SUZUKI PIANO INSIGHTS: RESULTS FROM A SURVEY OF PIANO  
TEACHER TRAINERS

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## ABSTRACT

This study summarizes survey findings from a dissertation that describes the development of piano pedagogy and teacher training within the Suzuki Association of the Americas (SAA). A survey was developed in order to gather information and perceptions from the 52 active piano teacher trainers approved by the SAA in 2005; 30 surveys were returned for a response rate of 57.7%. Trends were compiled, and elements of both historical inquiry and qualitative content analysis were employed, as the questions involved both objective and subjective data.

The influence of the original violin method was universally acknowledged, but piano pedagogy within the SAA clearly developed along two paths: those who followed the method as practiced in Japan and brought to the Americas by Haruko Kataoka, and those who wished to incorporate more mainstream ideas and flexibility. SAA trends cited were earlier music reading, musical expression in the first book, parent classes, repertoire changes, embracing expertise from top-tier artists outside the Suzuki world, and alterations in the method's components for cultural or economic reasons.

Both teacher training and trainer approval grew from no system at all in the 1970's to an increasingly demanding and organized program with criteria at every level. Participants embraced high standards but were concerned about a lack of new trainees; suggestions included allowing graduates to enter training through a streamlined application process and to award certificates at multiple levels. Formal certification was first offered in 2007 during the course of this study, illustrating the ongoing movement within the SAA to increase the influence and appeal of its teacher development program.

# Active Music Classes for Infants Promote Acquisition of Musical Structure



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## Introduction

Children acquire knowledge of Western musical pitch structure (tonality) through everyday exposure to music (enculturation), including the implicit knowledge that musical pieces are composed from a set of notes called a scale (for a review see Hannon & Trainor, 2007). However, little is known about the effects of early musical training on this learning, although a recent study suggests that musical training in the preschool period accelerates acquisition (Corrigall & Trainor, 2009).

Given that infants are attracted to music, that the brain is most open to change early in development, and that music is an important part of the mother-infant bond, active participation early directed music classes may accelerate musical acquisition. The present study, part of a larger project funded by the Grammy Foundation, was aimed at determining whether 6 months of participatory Suzuki-philosophy music classes beginning at 6 months of age could affect infants' acquisition of scale knowledge in music. Parents and children participated in either a weekly one-hour interactive Suzuki music class where teachers worked with parents and infants to build a repertoire of lullabies, action songs and nursery rhymes, or a control group involving passive exposure in a play setting to synthesized music in the form of a rotating series of recordings from the popular "Baby Einstein" series. At the end of the training, we measured infants' differentiation of tonal compared to atonal musical structure.

## Purpose

To test whether 6 months of participation in an early childhood Suzuki music program affects infants' knowledge of Western tonality.

## Methods

### Participants:

- 20 10- to 13-month-old infants who attended Suzuki-philosophy music classes
- 10 10- to 13-month-old infants who attended control passive listening music classes

### Procedure: Training

- Infants were recruited at 6 months of age through government-funded Ontario Early Years Centres with our partners from Today's Child and Wesley Urban Ministries
- Infants were randomly assigned to participate for 6 months in one of two groups involving:
  - weekly interactive Suzuki-philosophy music classes for parents and infants
  - weekly passive listening music classes involving unstructured play



## Methods

### Procedure: Testing

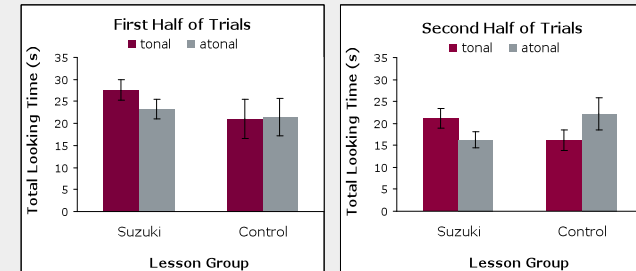
- Stimuli (Fig. 1). Infants listened to two versions of a short unfamiliar piano piece by Thomas Atwood (1765-1838), one played correctly (tonal, first two measures Fig. 1A) and the other changing from G major to G-flat major every beat, which resulted in no sense of key while sensory dissonance remained unaltered (atonal, first two measures Fig. 1B).



- Testing Procedure (Fig. 2). Infants controlled how long they listened to each version (tonal, atonal) in a preferential looking paradigm with 20 trials.

## Results

Fig. 2. An ANOVA with Version (tonal, atonal), and TestHalf (1st 10 trials, 2nd 10 trials) as within-subject factors and TrainingGroup (Suzuki, passive) as a between-subjects factor revealed a main effect of TestHalf,  $F(1,28) = 5.40$ ,  $p = .028$  (looking times decreased over the test session) and an interaction between Version and TrainingGroup,  $F(1,28) = 3.98$ ,  $p = .056$ . Error bars represent standard error of the mean.



Infants in the Suzuki group looked significantly longer at the tonal version,  $F(1,19) = 5.61$ ,  $p = .029$  and looking times decreased from the first to second half of trials,  $F(1,19) = 9.41$ ,  $p = .006$ . Infants in the Passive group showed no significant preferences and looking times did not decrease over trials. Therefore, only infants in the Suzuki group demonstrated knowledge of tonality.

## Conclusions

The results indicate that active musical participation accelerates musical acquisition compared to passive listening. Infants can engage in meaningful musical training when appropriate pedagogical approaches are used. Other aspects of the larger project suggest possible social and cognitive benefits of the Suzuki program as well, indicating the potential usefulness of the approach for special populations and infants at risk.

## References

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**Self-Efficacy in Early Childhood String Education:  
Integrating Pedagogical Approaches to Promote Positive Self-Belief**

ABSTRACT

Beliefs that individuals hold about themselves have a tremendous impact upon their behaviors, attitudes, and achievements. Self-efficacy perception, or the belief in one's ability to accomplish a specific task, has been shown in numerous quantitative studies to strongly predict choices and persistence in adolescents and adults. Because of the critical role that early childhood experiences play in human development, however, it is important to understand the processes whereby self-efficacy is shaped from very young ages.

The present research seeks to observe influences upon self-perception development in nine early childhood music students (ages 2-5) who are taught Suzuki string lessons through a motivational system based on principles from self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997). Videos of student lessons and interviews with parents and teachers will be coded according to the four sources of self-efficacy, and by behaviors or comments demonstrating self-efficacy perceptions (e.g., choices, persistence, independent performance). Findings will be used to assist music educators in fostering strong self-beliefs in students from the very beginning of their educational lives.