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## **Learning: A Fascinating Process**

The development of musical skills in children is a fascinating subject for study, but those of us teaching and parenting don't have access to much research in this area. Scientific studies of the growth of musical skills in children are almost non-existent. Measurement of success is obviously too complicated. If a child makes seven good serves out of ten in volleyball, we can all see and record the results; however a student may play all the correct notes insofar as pitch and rhythm are concerned, only to be judged by a musician as deficient in dynamics, balance and phrasing. One can understand why studies are lacking in this area.

Fortunately, many of the principles of learning observed in other areas will help us in our work with children. Both the Suzuki parent and the Suzuki teacher can profit from a knowledge and understanding of the ways in which young children learn both motor and cognitive skills. Psychologists have done extensive research in these areas. Observations drawn from this research do have a bearing on problems we face in working with young children in music.

Although Suzuki says that he gave up reading books by psychologists some time ago, he did arrive at many of the same conclusions after his own extensive study of children. Such statements as "At age three children are unable to..." or "A four-year old cannot comprehend...", caused him to reject others' opinions and led him to study children directly himself.

Suzuki observed the learning habits of children. These observations and his reflections on them gave birth to his idea to apply the mother-tongue method to the teaching of music to small children. As his success tells us, he found that children have enormous potential for learning and that poor teaching; poor environment and inadequate adult expectations have been the principal causes of limiting that potential.

## **The Lesson: Before, During, After**

*The Boy Scout motto, “Be Prepared”, speaks succinctly of the value of preparation in any activity. We could also quote a few Starr versions of proverbs that support the same premise: “An ounce of preparation is worth a pound of remedial work”... “One piece in the head is worth two on the page”... “Where there’s practice, there’s hope”... “All’s well that is worked out well”... “When all else fails, practice”.*

### **The First Lesson**

*Psychologists tell us that we can save the child apprehension and discomfiture by preparing her for new experiences. Even adults are apprehensive when faced with a totally new situation. It helps so much to be familiar with some aspects of the new experience. For this reason it is good for the parent and child to observe lessons of other children for some time before actually beginning their own lessons.*

*“This afternoon we are going to visit a music teacher who will be giving some boys and girls piano lessons”, mother tells Sally. “We’re going to sit quietly and listen. If you want to ask or tell me something, please whisper so that we don’t disturb the lessons of the other children. You may take a coloring book and crayons or one of your other books to look at quietly while we are there”.*

*In this way the child may observe without any pressure. She learns that quietness is expected and she absorbs the mood of the environment. When she is ready to go for her own first lesson, she will be at home in the studio.*

### **Practice**

*The first and most important preparation for the lesson is good practice of the assigned material. Naturally the student is going to look forward to her lesson if she feels confident in her practice and is eager to share her accomplishment with her teacher. Everyone enjoys doing a task for which she has prepared with both time and effort. There is the pride and joy of feeling, “I can do this very well”.*