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Foreword to the English Edition

Shinichi Suzuki is widely recognized in the United States and throughout the world as a master violin teacher. However, it was not only through music education that Suzuki effectively promoted early education. He saw that the environment and education during early childhood is most crucial in determining a person's lifelong path. He insisted that while every child is born with the potential to develop beautifully, this development depends on how a child is raised. The basics of this approach to music education are called the "Suzuki Method," and this book is a record of how this method is put into practice at preschool levels from age three to five.

It is difficult to determine the number of children that have received this preschool education. First of all, there are currently eight experimental kindergartens that were formerly associated with Suzuki's Talent Education Institute. Following Suzuki's death, these schools formed an independent association. Yoji Gakuen, a kindergarten Suzuki started at Talent Education's main office in Matsumoto, has held over fifty graduations. The kindergarten that I founded, with a capacity of 150 children, now has over one thousand graduates. In addition, there are 113 Japanese kindergartens affiliated with the Yoji Kaihatsu Kyokai (Institute of Early Childhood Development) founded by Masaru Ibuka of Sony. These institutions are our sister schools, drawing from the same pedagogical spring. I hesitate to conjecture on the total number of graduates from all of these schools, which must be quite large if the children who attended Early Childhood Development kindergartens are included.

It is likewise difficult to determine the number of kindergarten masters and teachers. I cannot even begin to count the number of teachers that I have trained, nor do I know how many people have truly understood and practiced our method. It is also impossible for me to estimate the levels of kindergarten graduates, since I do not believe in IQ and other such tests. I firmly believe, however, that all the graduates of these preschools are fully demonstrating their natural abilities as fine human beings and are contributing to society in their own environments.

What I can say with conviction is that Suzuki's Talent Education is a human education. Every baby has the potential for high-ability development. Because all abilities are fostered by the environment, parents and teachers must make efforts to improve the early environment for children so they will be willing to learn on their own.

Suzuki taught that human ability is not inborn and that at the core of human ability is heart. He wished to foster a beautiful heart in each child, thereby contributing toward a peaceful world. If my book helps the reader to empathize with Suzuki's ideals, I could not be more delighted.

I want to thank Masayoshi Kataoka of the Suzuki Institutes of St. Louis, who made this possible, as well as the translator Kyoko Selden and the publisher Summy-Birchard.

Shigeki Tanaka

Chapter 1

Questioning Traditional Teaching Methods

1. Believing in Children's Potential

It is extremely difficult to change an adult's way of thinking. While lecturing in various places on early childhood education, I have recently begun to feel the difficulty of redirecting old thoughts that have been pounded in through many experiences over a long period of time.

For example, young mothers readily accept my ideas. However, nursery school and kindergarten teachers who have specialized in the education of three- to five-year-olds don't seem to understand it. Some teachers certainly have deep appreciation and can readily understand new ideas, but they are not as good at carrying out new ideas. Unlike young mothers, teachers often become conservative and are unable to do anything daring.

If a teacher does whatever is done elsewhere, he or she can assume little responsibility and can make excuses whenever a problem arises. However, if a teacher starts something new, the responsibility is heavy, and the teacher often faces resistance from outside and worries about being unable to shoulder the task alone.

If teachers think not only of their own position but also of the children under their care, there is no need to be timid. Indeed, every teacher wants children to understand and develop their abilities. If this were possible by traditional methods, there would be fewer problems. In reality, however, there are many dropouts everywhere, which nobody seems to find strange or abnormal. Teachers meanwhile try to justify their positions of authority, and the problem only gets worse.

A teacher with deep affection toward children must seek new methods and must return open-heartedly to the rudiments of teaching. To such a teacher I must first ask, "Do you really believe in each child's potential?"

Chapter 3

How to Develop Ability

1. Understanding Developmental Stages

Lazy teachers are apt to copy what others have done instead of coming up with their own ideas. Then when they fail to achieve the desired results, they may jump to the conclusion that the lessons they copied had only worked in special cases. If they do succeed, however, these teachers may become satisfied with their success and try to go no further. While it is certainly important for teachers to use models, they must only use these models as steppingstones toward establishing their own teaching techniques.

Indeed, there is no one supreme teaching method, and there will always be better ones. The constant search for better methods is an important part of the talent education approach. Even Mr. Suzuki, whose violin teaching method has received worldwide recognition, immersed himself in the study of better teaching methods and strived for daily improvement. When faced with this example, a teacher may feel that what he or she is doing seems inadequate.

Whenever I work with children, I always marvel that they grow so much with no more than perfunctory assistance. I only wish that I had more strength. I am convinced that young and zealous teachers, as well as veterans with rich experiences, can discover improved teaching methods for themselves.

According to Article I of the Japanese Basic Law of Education, our aim is to build the foundation for healthy bodies and minds that form the root and stem of human formation. In kindergarten and nursery school education, children's rapid development can be divided into four areas: physical, intellectual, emotional, and social (moral). From these are established six additional areas: health, society, nature, language, music, and art. Of course none of these should be taught in isolation, since they are all mutually related. Especially when working with young children, exploring any one of these areas thoroughly leads one to realize that all of the others are included in it.