

*LANIER-KEOSAIAN*

*Debate Rebuttal*

I agree with my lovely esteemed colleague that Suzuki's teaching methods have influenced string teaching all over the world. I disagree, however, that without that method of instruction, a child will be "unable to achieve success" in music, or in developing the many human characteristics Suzuki teaches. While it is a kind and gentle way to introduce children to a new world, the Suzuki method, by its delay and often complete omission of the use of music notation, relegates itself to the category of preparatory music experiences.

I do agree with my colleague that "adults can only provide a suitable environment for children," not determine their future. This is a huge responsibility. Vygotsky said that adults are obligated to provide children with the tools necessary to learn. Music notation is a tool necessary to the development of a young music student. The child may eventually choose not to pursue music further as she grows, but without having had all of the tools needed at her disposal as part of her environment, the integrity of her decision about her future is undermined.

The preparation you describe for the child prior to her first lesson is exactly that of other early childhood music programs. When the parents sign up the child, they are given tapes of music for the child to listen to and to learn. Between music lessons the child continues listening to and learning material on the tape. Parents and caretakers are given books of songs to sing with the children, and the parents take the class along with the children. Therefore, the Suzuki method is not unique in this respect. It follows a format similar to other early childhood music experiences.

My esteemed colleague generalizes that American teachers lack the patience to wait for children to develop at their own rate, unlike Suzuki and teachers trained in his method. I maintain that patience, whether part of one's training or not, is personal and individual in its presence in all

of us, and that it does not reside only in Suzuki teachers or, for that matter, in any other type of grouping of people.

My colleague tells us that Suzuki believed in teaching students how to perform with technical accuracy prior to the reading of notation, and that this is similar to the way in which babies learn to speak. She says that only when they have mastered speech are they taught to read, and that reading is a “separate skill.” I strongly disagree. By the time children reach school, they have played with alphabet blocks and alphabet refrigerator magnets, have learned alphabet songs, and have been read many books. Not only that, but the adults around them are constantly using elements in their environment to tutor them in letter and word recognition. I maintain that as these children are learning to speak, they are being introduced to the elements of language reading. It is incorrect to say that they only began to read after they have mastered speech and that this is the model for Suzuki’s method. If this were the case, then the Suzuki method would begin introducing elements of music notation as the child begins even to listen to music.

I strongly disagree that “a child who is not exposed to this method might not ever develop characteristics such as memory ability, concentration, perseverance, morality, and building of character and appreciation of beauty to his or her fullest capacity.” These are characteristics which develop as a result of the application of energy and effort to the task at hand and certainly are present in large quantity in students who learn by the traditional method of music instruction. Perseverance is, perhaps, the most important attribute for the Suzuki student who suddenly arrives in her first orchestra or ensemble class, only to find that she is un-prepared to participate. Perseverance and determination are what that child will need to overcome the lack of skill in reading music notation that is, unfortunately, the hallmark of the Suzuki method.

