

Only that which is cultivated can also develop!

by Kerstin Wartberg
(Translated by Mike Hoover)

In 1980, after completing my degree at the music conservatory in Cologne, Germany, I had the opportunity to study for almost two years with Dr. Suzuki at the Talent Education Institute in Matsumoto, Japan. Because Dr. Suzuki did not use any didactic written materials in his lessons, I made it a habit from the very beginning to take extensive notes. I also had numerous opportunities to ask him specific questions, allowing me to expand and modify these notes further.

I have many fond memories of Dr. Suzuki's relaxed and personal teaching style. Between lesson activities he would typically sit with us teacher trainees, drink tea, and discuss themes that were especially important to him. These thoughts often resurfaced, as in these excerpts from a speech to parents at the Matsumoto Summer School in August, 1982. I quote from my notes:

1. The Importance of Daily Practice

Dear parents, some of you have certainly had a similar experience concerning practice with your child: “We were so busy the past few days that we didn’t have time to practice. Today we will make up for the missed three days and practice three times as long.” With two examples from other life experiences we can recognize that this conclusion is flawed.

Example 1: Imagine that you have forgotten to give your child medicine for two days. You decide to give him three days’ worth of medicine tomorrow.

Example 2: You give a plant with brown leaves three days’ worth of water after forgetting to water it for several days. Do you really think that it will have green leaves tomorrow?

The life experiences of many generations teach us that developmental processes and growth phases cannot be skipped over. The conclusions to be drawn from these small examples speak for themselves and should be clear to everyone:

*The legitimacy of natural laws are equally valid in raising children,
their development and their encouragement.*

2. The Regular Review of Previously Learned Pieces

Dear parents, there is a good way to practice at home by which rapid progress and confidence arise, and there is also a bad way that results in slow progress paired with a feeling of insecurity. In both cases the parents and students give lots of effort, but the results are very, very different. I know that many parents and students know the correct method for practice, but they do not manage to follow it consequently. All children have learned to speak with this method, and every child has achieved a remarkably high standard of speech. The method of learning to speak must simply be applied to daily practice, which means that the student listens regularly to the pieces that he has learned or will be learning in the future. When the child has learned the first piece, he should play this piece several times daily.

When the second piece has been learned, the student should play the first **and** second pieces several times each day. For the third piece the same rule applies: The student practices daily the **first, second and third** pieces, and so on.

A formal plan for review is needed only when the student has reached an advanced stage, at which point the repertoire is too extensive.

This practice method is simple and natural and will certainly succeed. Nevertheless, many parents and students choose the strenuous and false way: The student practices only the new piece to be learned. Previously learned pieces are seldom or never reviewed.

Let's consider this trap and transfer the poor practice method to the learning of speech: A child learns the first word. After this, the second word is taught and after that the third, etc. **Thus only one new word** is taught to the child, and previously learned words are neither reviewed nor heard. Despite great effort, this practice method results in a remarkably low facility of speech. Fluent and effortless speech would develop in only a few remarkably gifted children. Unfortunately, in traditional (music) education, this is often the path chosen.

After lots of searching and my long experience, I am convinced that the method that follows the example of learning the mother tongue is the correct, natural and most effective method.

3. The importance of musical listening for the musical development

I am absolutely convinced that every child can achieve a natural love for music. If we sensitize our children to music, they will also be more receptive in other areas. Helping a person toward a refined perceptual awareness is an invaluable source of happiness for the rest of the child's and parents' lives. Who could impart this unmeasurable value except the child's own parents?

If we play recordings with the lesson pieces as well as other works of high musical quality for our children daily, this will certainly not be without consequences. The children will gradually develop an inner bond with the pieces as well as a musical sensitivity that can be refined and deepened.

The parents must assume responsibility for the daily listening of selected musical pieces; this is exclusively a matter of parental vigilance.

However, this is clearly easier said than done. Why? Perhaps due to inadequate conviction of the parents? Some people simply cannot accept the fact that it is largely their responsibility to awaken and build an ear for music in their children. Apparently, they are of the opinion reflected in this and similar comments: "Play the recording every day? Something like this cannot change that which is inborn. It is not within our power!"

This is contradictory to the fact that children, whose parents recognize the importance of listening to music, develop a relationship to music. The uncompromising pursuit of this goal and the deliberate shaping of a child's environment is a special and invaluable gift from parents to their children. It is also just as valid for raising children: Only that which is cultivated can also develop!

I am repeatedly saddened that so few parents can decide to awaken and stimulate the musical powers in their children. I ask you all to cultivate the joy for music in your children. You can have a greater effect on your child than most people think.

The goal is a comprehensive stimulation of your child through music that includes, in addition to the intellectual domain, especially the character and spiritual domains. Show your child the wonderful world of music; it is a life long treasure.