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“Call back, please, when you’re humming all of Book One”: Developing Ear, Memory, and Motivation before starting lessons

**Mother Tongue mother foot Method
(remember Babywalk talk?)
by Armena Marderosian**

Q: When prospective parents call for lessons, what is your response?

- a. “I have an opening. You can start next week.”
- b. “I’m full now. You can join the waiting list.”
- c. “Come to observe lessons.”
- d. “Call back next fall.”

I suggest that you...

- e. supervise their establishment of a **home** program of daily, maximum (quiet enough) **listening to the Suzuki Book One** recording. (Allow times of silence too). (Listen to other beloved music too). Listen to the Suzuki Book One recording many times a day, hours a day, in all contexts: use programmable players with speakers in every possible space: music room, living room, family room, kitchen, children’s rooms, outside patios, yards, and for pianists, next to a fine piano. Listen eyes closed (often). Listening in the car is only an addition to in-house listening. Use personal headphones too. Ask parents to play the music very quietly, as if only for themselves, sometimes humming along to set an example of internalization (not forcing kids to listen, not forcing kids to sit). Move to the music, dance to the music, feel the rhythms, enjoy it, make up words, have fun... For piano, I recommend Haruko Kataoka’s Suzuki Piano Book One recording. Unlike on other recordings, here each piece plays four times in a row-for memorizing; also, for all four Twinkle Variations and for Honeybee, Mrs. Kataoka plays left hand accompaniments, giving harmonic foundation to each piece. This recording by Mrs. Kataoka, co-founder of Suzuki Piano Method in Japan, is helpful for its unique qualities.

Ask parents to hum and sing with the songs. If parents say they “can’t sing”, are “tone deaf”, or that their “singing will hurt their children’s ears”, tell the parents that they CAN learn to sing; teach them to sing right away! Close all eyes. Sing one note for them. Ask them to sing it back. If they sing instead a different note, sing THEIR note back to THEM. Let them hear that the notes are the same. Have them listen to their own sound. If they at first don’t sing one note, but instead “drift” up or down in pitch, then teach them to listen to how to stay on one single pitch. If they say they can’t sing even one note, then sing TO them the pitches of their WORDS as they are SAYing them. Ask them to repeat what YOU sing. Give them a small task. Give one more. One at a time. Work with them until they get it. Assure them that their fluency in their native language, with their clear mastery of the complex and subtle tonal inflections of their language, proves that they DO have an “ear”, and CAN hear well enough to sing specific pitches. You’ll work with the children like this too. Parents will see how we work, in do-able bits.

Explain to parents that they CAN and SHOULD SING the Suzuki pieces, because it helps the children. This sets the example, gives the model of how to learn, and validates it. And it gives parents the ability to help the children develop independence in their learning. It helps develop the “ear” of each person involved.

Ask them also to sing daily a simple scale up: Do re mi fa sol la ti do. And the same scale down: Do ti la sol fa me re do. When that’s easy, ask also for broken chords, up and down, to be sung daily. Start with the 3-note major triad: Do mi sol mi do. When that’s easy, sing a harmonic MINOR scale: Do re ME fa sol LE ti do. Changing the vowel shows that the note differs from the major scale note; in the minor scale, the changed note is a half-step lower than its major scale counterpart. Natural minor could be sung thus: Do re ME fa sol LE TE do.

We'll ask children to remember the model sounds and to reproduce the same sounds, sounds which include pitch, tone quality, volume, shape and length. "Practice this sound". We'll ask them to notice where the sounds come from on their instruments.

Later, when the children are trying to "sound out" new pieces, they can help themselves by singing the next notes. If the children want parents' help, **parents can help by SINGING** the next note. The children and parents will already have the sounds of the pieces in their minds from all the pre-playing listening. They will learn to "pick out" new songs by finding on the instrument the same sounds they hear in their minds, the same sounds they hear on their recordings.

We will **encourage them** to figure out their new songs on their own, "**by ear**". They'll develop independence to learn and work out their new songs just by listening, with trial and error at the instrument. We will allow them to develop this ability just as we allow babies their own timing in learning to talk and walk. We **HAVE** to allow babies to learn to walk and talk at their own speed. We **NEED** to allow children to figure out their music at THEIR own speed. (We won't ruin children's efforts toward discovery by **SHOWING** them the next note, which is **ROTE** teaching.) We'll help instead by **SINGING** the next note. We'll ask them to close eyes while we **PLAY** the next notes. They'll match sounds instrument to instrument as well as matching instrumental sound to vocal sound. Thus, children can continue their **EAR** development. (We'll not ruin their fun in sound discovery). We'll let the **EAR** have the mind's full attention (and not let the **EYES** steal it away).

Explain that we are developing the ear and memory with repeated listening to the same pieces, over and over, and that later, memorization will come more quickly, with less listening needed. This ability to memorize what we hear will grow with repeated listening. Clarify that **we are letting the children learn all the Suzuki pieces first by listening to them**, and that **Suzuki Method starts with ear training. This is learning "by ear", which is different from learning by "rote"** ("rote" means "showing without knowing").

As children and parents **learn how to learn by listening**, they develop their **ability to notice more about what they hear**, and what they feel in music, a language of the heart. They experience living beat and living tone, singing tone. They follow melodies, and feel the effects of accompaniment. They absorb the musical meanings of everything they're hearing: beginnings, endings, impulse, forward drive to important notes, building up, melting, various kinds of motion, waves of sound, swinging, rocking, sailing, speeding, repetition, change, resistance and gravity. They develop a sense of "the beat", a **LIVING** beat, and the different feel (or swing) of each kind of beat grouping (meter), the feeling of flow, of bouncing, sailing, floating, flying, of upbeats, impetus, downbeats, the sense of different rhythms, sense of overall timing... They develop natural phrasing, sensitivity to pitches, awareness of all intervals, to steps, skips, leaps, landings, cascading, reverberation, qualities of chords, function and meaning of long notes, high notes, crescendos, decrescendos, high points, patterns, echoes, variants, spacings, harmonies, melodies, counterpoint, independent voices, polyphony, monody, accompaniment, and accompaniment styles, keys, modulation, transposition, accelerando, ritardando, activity, repose, searching, finding, urgency, relaxation, forms, textures, timbres, voicing, contrasts, articulations, touch, accents, varied repetition, exposition, development, recapitulation, pauses, silence, whole pieces, expectation, surprise, coaxing, cadence, deception, fulfillment, mood, character, and everything else in musical experience. Their "feel" for music will become intuitive. They'll feel mood in the music, vehemence, and regret, exuberance, exhilaration, and fun! Their playing will become musical and expressive from all this repeated listening. They'll play "with feeling", and **ENJOY** playing the music! They'll play with heart. **Imagination** will be part of their music making. When they learn new pieces, the elements they've absorbed from the old well-known pieces will enliven the new pieces. They'll memorize new pieces that they've never heard before, because the ability to memorize becomes strong. Because of their ease, familiarity, comfort, and **FREEDOM** with the instrument, the hands will find transposing on the instrument happens naturally, guided by the ear. Also, **improvisation** will come naturally, as long as its appearance is **appreciated, respected, and encouraged** (not squelched), just as we actually **IMPROVISE** when we **TALK!** Kids eventually will be able to play most anything they hear. What a great gift! It's not an inborn gift; it's a **developed** gift.

Once the children "know" the pieces in their minds and can hum them, sing them, and can find them by ear on their instruments, we DO physically demonstrate **HOW** to play. We show the best natural technique from the beginning so we can use our bodies easily for musical expression through living tone.

Children will **ALSO** eventually develop the ability to look at printed music to learn to play music. **They will learn to read music.** They'll study and play "reading pieces" that they have not listened to first. Just as babies play with alphabet blocks and are read to from books they're looking at, yet are learning to speak their language by listening and imitating, "by ear", we let beginning music students work with the written symbols of music. They can learn reading through activities such as rhythm clapping and sight singing at the same time that their Suzuki pieces are being learned by listening. Thus,

TWO separate yet related processes for learning are developed. Students use their eyes to learn the reading pieces. They'll still use their ears for their Suzuki pieces. These two ways to learn the music, by ear, and by eye, that is, by listening and by reading, will MERGE eventually, like in language learning, our Mother Tongue learning. These two streams flowing side by side finally join together to form a powerful river. The ear always comes first, since **music is sound with feeling, as is language.**

Ask parents to contact you sometimes to report on their listening: how much, when, where, how, and to what, also reactions and effects. Are they singing along? Are they trying to play the pieces? Are all enjoying the repetition? (If not, you want to know now).

Assign the parents **reading** such as Shin'ichi Suzuki's "Nurtured by Love", "Ability Development from Age Zero", "Talent Education for Young Children", and his other books, and his articles, also John Holt's "How Children Learn", and Haruko Kataoka's "Sensibility and Education", and for pianists Haruko Kataoka's "Thoughts on the Suzuki Piano Method", "Thoughts on Piano Technique", and her "How to Teach Beginners" (downloadable from the [Suzuki] Piano Basics website)", and her "Video Lecture", also Doris Koppelman's "Introducing Suzuki Piano", and selected articles. Give websites for The Suzuki Association of the Americas (SAA) www.suzukiassociation.org, The International Suzuki Association (ISA), your local associations, and for Suzuki Piano Basics <http://core.ecu.edu/hist/wilburnk/SuzukiPianoBasics/>

Introduce the Mother Tongue Method, the way we each learn our mother tongue as the way we can let children learn music. **Ask parents to think about** how every baby learns to talk and walk, Mother Tongue and mother foot method for baby talk babywalk. Ask them to remember the elements of the nurturing environment that encourages and allows these extraordinary skills to develop "naturally" for every healthy child. Discuss parents' involvement in lessons and at home, and the all-important positive approach (see the article "Approach Positive as babywalk talk" by Armena Marderosian in the "Sing for your Baby" section of www.suniproject.org). Let them know that their main jobs are to play the recordings daily, to find ways daily to foster happy practice, to be part of lessons and recitals, and to cultivate positive approach.

Invite parents to contact you sometimes to **discuss the reading**. Find out **if they really agree** with the points in the reading, with the approach of the Suzuki Method. If they have disagreements, you want to know now. Ask them to speak of their feelings about music, and about lessons. Learn about the parents' music background. **Ask parents to talk about what they want** from a teacher, from lessons, and for their children (and FROM their children if that is their feeling). What are parents' long term plans for their children's music lessons? Parents sometimes want for their children a re-creation of their own childhood music training. Sometimes parents want instead a change from that. Parents and teachers need to discuss these wishes and expectations before committing to lessons together.

Explain that through the Suzuki Method, **all children** can develop the sensitivity and ability to play great classical music beautifully, the same way that all children work incessantly to develop the ability to talk and walk, and that the **happiness** this brings is worth all the effort. Clarify that the children's happiness comes not only from positive approach; it comes especially from their own **ability development** to the highest possible level, because doing things beautifully at a **high level** is a joy, especially doing music, which affects its performers as well as its other listeners. Ask them to realize that **children's happy progress is in the adults' hands**. We adults skillfully and thoughtfully keep devising ways to **inspire** and help the children **build their abilities** through **effective listening, observing, and practice** (never forcing). Help guide parents to know how to **respect the child's delicate sense of self**, and to relax their own.

Let parents see how every child can develop musical "talent" through Shin'ichi Suzuki's method of "Talent Education", of "Ability Development". It is all in the hands of the adults to help every child achieve a high level, for their own happiness first of all, just as all children enjoy becoming fluent in walking and talking. All children **want** to do this, to walk and to talk. Every child can succeed in learning music within the same kind of social-language-sound environment as their Mother Tongue and mother foot environment (if babies never see anyone walk, do they try to walk?).

Help parents consider their roles to create a happy, long-time directed listening environment each day, right away, which **continues once lessons begin**, listening to Book One, and to each of the later books in advance. Explain parents' roles to attend lessons and recitals attentively, and to discover ways to assure daily **happy practice** sessions with their children. Ask if they will make **this family study a number one priority** with recitals, lessons, daily listening and practice chosen over competing activities.

Ask them to take every opportunity to **let the children hear the world's greatest performers**, especially in person, up close, to be inspired by the highest models. Explain why from the beginning children need the **best instruments to play**, capable of producing the most resonant, beautiful, soulful, and variable tone, living tone, at any tempo.

And tell them that **deciding to become Suzuki parents is like deciding to get married!** For the teacher as well, it's a decision to commit to a long-term relationship with the parents, like a marriage. You learn to communicate with and understand each other, and keep in constant touch. You work together to help the children develop beautifully and happily. Teachers need to know **BOTH parents**, both enthusiastic and willing. Additional guardians also need to be part of the support system so the children can listen to their

recordings and practice everywhere. **All the adults work together** for the **nurturing of the children**. Teacher and parents/guardians are a support team.

Show parents to relax as smiling supports. Teach parents how to practice **positive approach**, an art and science of the **most effective** form of communication, giving positive wording to each comment and each direction, to politely say to "please do it this way, yes, this is right, thank you!" (to avoid "no", shouldn't, don't", "can't", "wrong" "bad", "but", "however", to avoid criticizing, frowning, humiliating, and to avoid showing the wrong way). Tell the children what is right! Then show what to work on next (rather than "correcting " them). See American Suzuki Journal articles about positive approach such as Ms. Marderosian's "Approach Positive as babywalk talk" first published Spring 2003 Vol.31, #3, pages 38-40, available in the latest 2005 version by email from armena1949@gmail.com, also Marderosian's "Kids Want to Save Face", both available on www.sunproject.org "Sing for Your Baby" section.

When you feel parents are embracing these roles, you ask them to **CALL BACK WHEN THEY'RE ALL HUMMING ALL OF BOOK ONE**. The whole family learns all the songs by ear before lessons begin. The family listens and can hum or sing Book One.

Q: When they're humming all of book one, what would be your next step?

- a. Start the children's lessons
- b. Have parents and children observe a few lessons
I recommend that you...
- c. **give both (all) parents lessons** of their own on Suzuki's beginning pieces, The Twinkle Variations, and other Suzuki Book One pieces. They'll learn good tone production, musical playing, and the all-important **positive-approach** psychology of figuring out how say yes (instead of no) and how to tell children what to do (rather than what not to do). **Parents are your students now too**, and when the children's lessons begin, the parents are there too as students **in your studio, observing** the lessons of the whole lesson group, letting you the teacher be the director while they take a student role. **Ask parents to let YOU WIN the students' attention at lessons. Parents become quiet observers** (not forcing children's compliance, not interrupting teacher). **Parents, please become silent partners in the lesson.** Discuss your approaches to lesson behavior, home behavior, and "discipline". Look for agreement. Here you can give parents "teacher training" tips for home practice with their children, and start them in pre-Twinkle activities. If you teach a group of parents together, they can become wonderful supports to each other. Parent lessons can continue as a valuable support to children's learning, and also for the parents' own enjoyment in musical development.
- d. **invite parents and children to begin observing other families' lessons** indefinitely, **joining "THE LESSON PARTNER GROUP"** watching each other's individual lessons- the "**individual lesson group**" symbolized by **a circle around a triangle**: the circle of observers around the parent-child-teacher triangle. Lesson partners are together in the individual lesson group. This is a **master class format which includes parents**. It's a support group for mutual learning and motivation, for inspiration.

Allow observing families to leave when the children are tired, and ask them to stay low-key, as with the listening. Children should feel it's all voluntary (not forced). Better yet when CHILDREN FEEL it's their OWN IDEA.

Show how they will be **learning by watching and listening to the others**, and that once their own individual lessons begin, they will continue to learn by watching and listening to individual lessons of the others; and the others will watch THEM. Since everyone gets used to being watched each week, kids become comfortable performing. Explain that **parents learn a lot by watching lessons of other parents' children** in addition to their own, and that they also learn from the other parents. Watching lessons helps the parents and children to understand what the teacher is working toward. Often it's the same principles with each student. Everyone's advancement is strengthened when families can see each other's lessons. In Japan, I saw parents coming to watch lessons even when their own children were not there!

While observing, families learn what lessons are all about, and that daily home practices are part of weekly lessons, that lessons guide home practice, and that "ability grows at home". Families see that **this process is not "magic"**, that **"taking lessons" is not "magic" that makes you suddenly able to play**. It's a **"working together" process** that keeps going, and changing, and challenging.

Ask the parents to keep in touch with you about how they and the children are feeling, and what's happening at home. Do they like the music? Do they want to spend years with this music? Are they humming? singing? clapping? tapping? dancing? What happens when the recording is played? Are the children trying to play? Pretending to play?

When you feel the children's and parents' home listening is established, and they have watched enough to understand what lessons are all about, and they know that daily home practice and listening come with lessons, ask them to call you when the children's desire for lessons is obviously in full bloom, and they are constantly asking, "When is MY turn? I want lessons!"

Explain why the **children need to WANT lessons** before they start lessons, that children need to know, to feel that it is **their own wish** to commit to study. (No forcing allowed- nowhere no how). If the children are not showing an interest in starting lessons, even with all the positive approach, listening, and watching, you keep waiting. **WE start to teach lessons** to children **only when** the children make it clear that **they want to learn from us**.

Discuss with parents if they themselves are still interested to work with you.

In this **pre-lesson period**, it's good for teachers to **make a home visit** to see the home environment, to see the physical space and the "feel" of that home and neighborhood-is it happy, positive approach, organized, relaxed, noisy, quiet, full of people, animals, frantic, focused, formal, relaxed, lively, calm, sedate...? Teachers can feel the family atmosphere, **see their instruments**, recordings, **listen to their sound equipment**, see their music books, see where practice and listening will happen, and guide the placement of music players for listening and self-taping/self-listening. Teachers will see also whatever else is going on in the home, and neighborhood, to learn what's important for that family.

This section, the next-to-the-last section, is for pianists

(There's a final section for everyone that comes after this piano section):

Pianists NEED to make a pre-lesson home visit to see if the piano and bench are good and in the right place. They'll advise how to get a good instrument. Explain the superiority of studying at a good grand piano from the start, for its tone and touch. "If you want your child to eat salad, you give the most attractive, colorful, beautiful, fresh ingredients; to be drawn to practice, **children need to be entranced by the instrument's richly beautiful resonance, its tone quality**, with wide dynamic range, **and its sensitive, quality touch.**" **Children are naturally drawn to beauty**, and are sensitive to subtle differences. Let them work with subtleties of beauty of tone from the beginning, so they'll develop sensitive playing, and versatility. They'll naturally be inspired to BE at such an instrument, and will be inspired AT the instrument. They'll be working as artists from the start. Give instruments with beautiful resonance of sound, with wonderful, even touch with the right feeling of resistance, with the grand piano's feeling of the escapement, "the bump", which gives an action which is not too stiff, and not too loose, but "just right" for good control of the speed of the key. (It's not logical to give children an inferior instrument to start with to see if they're interested in music, a common erroneous idea. Children are likely to be interested in making music at a wonderful instrument, which has beautiful sound and feel. Why would anyone be interested in spending study time on poor one?) Children should be given the BEST food, and the BEST instruments.

The piano first of all needs to have a lovely, captivating sound with **lasting, rich resonance**. This **lasting sound is what our feelings ride along on**. It's the **voice** of the instrument which captures our feelings and our attention. Its voice **becomes our own** voice. The piano needs to be able to produce singing tone, "living tone". Plus, the piano needs to be capable of sensitive and varied expression with that basic tone.

The children need to be able to produce the same quality ringing tone and coax the **same sensitivity** out of their **home pianos** as their **lesson pianos**. If the home piano requires pounding to get sound, children will become stiff and tense trying to play it. They'll develop harmful habits. If the home piano can produce only three different amounts of sound on a single note, children won't be able to create expressive musical lines. Their musicianship potential will be limited. If a family's piano has poor tone, dull tone, low resonance, dead tone, and/or poor range of tone, or poor action, now is the time, BEFORE LESSONS BEGIN, to advise how to get **a good tone instrument with perfect even action**. This allows children to be "relaxed", so they can develop a **natural technique**. **This is the path to good tone and musical playing**. Give them an instrument which has 10 to 20 levels of lovely sound, and encourage families to experiment creatively to learn to use the instrument artistically. Even the best teaching cannot give children good playing and listening habits if the piano at home doesn't allow artistic choices at a high level. Ability grows at home, and habits are formed at home seven days a week. **ONLY A HEALTHY HOME INSTRUMENT CAN FOSTER A HEALTHY MUSICIAN!**

If parents live apart, **each home** needs a good piano for children's daily practice, and each home needs home visits from the teacher. And of course, parents need to establish a regular piano tuning and maintenance schedule for their instruments.

Once families have a **good piano**, you need to supervise **where they put it**. This makes a big difference. A home visit again will let you see that the piano is moved to an inviting spot conducive to frequent practice, with space for the bench to be placed correctly on a uniformly flat surface, far enough from the keyboard for well-balanced sitting - playing.

Pianists need to teach parents and children **how to check their seating so they can sit** at the right height **at their home piano**. We're at the right height when the keyboard is **UNDER** our hands, with forearms parallel to the floor. To check, sit with legs straight down from the knees- vertical, with heels down and feet flat, with straight back and relaxed shoulders, hands in lap. Then, raise arms to be parallel to the floor with palms down. The keyboard should be **UNDER** the fingers, with arms still horizontal. If the keyboard is higher than that, we raise the seat. The seat needs to be flat, firm and solid. We can pile up carpet samples to achieve the right height of the seat. (Not pillows which are too soft and not solid or firm). The **bottom of the elbow should be about level** with the **top of the keys**. Thus, the forearm is parallel to the floor, and above the keys, with the extended fingers-hand-wrist-arm in alignment. For deciding the **distance of the piano bench** from the piano, teach **"Knees under keys"**.

"First your SEAT, then your feet." After checking and correcting the seat height first, then check the feet. Pianists' feet should reach the floor and be flat, with heels down. Pianists should be able to stand up. If feet don't reach the floor, make a higher "floor" surface. Footstools and carpet squares can create a flat, firm, solid floor to support the feet. The backs of the heels are down flat. They are vertically under back of the knees. **"Heels down"**. Below the knee, the legs are vertical. Feet are parallel to each other, with toes and heels the same distance apart, as far apart as the hips and shoulders. The feet placed thus balance the back vertically. (If the feet are wrong, the back falls down). **"Hips, knees, feet: same distance apart"**. You may need a separate pile of carpet squares under each foot, so the feet can be far enough apart. **"Back of heels under back of knees"**, **"Heels under knees"**, "Push heels into floor to feel lower back's alignment". **If the lower part of the legs are vertical** over flat feet, then the **back can be vertical**. This frees the shoulders-arms-elbows-hands-fingers to move naturally, and to freely **drop weight** into the keys for natural good tone production. (If the feet and back are unstable, there's a feeling of needing to "hold on" or "hang on for dear life" to the piano, from the insecurity of poor seating. This leads to poor technique and tone). **Vertical lower legs-vertical back-free arms-balanced hands**. Feet-back-arms-hands-fingers are all in balance.

When sitting is good, stretch up: **"Be a tree"**. Keeping heels down and feet flat, slowly breathe in, opening the chest and shoulders, and reach up with hands toward the sky to stretch the spine up, straight up. "Be a tree; be a tall tree". Wait. Then slowly breathe out and slowly bring arms down to the sides, keeping open the chest and shoulders, letting shoulders drop. Breathe in slowly going up; breathe out slowly coming down. This **attention to breathing helps clear the attention**.

This attention to sitting needs to be **applied to ALL sitting - at home as well as at lesson**, in any chair in any place. Good body use needs to be practiced always (not just in music practice). Let's build only good habits. Adjust seat and feet at the dinner table; scrutinize all seating, including at school desks. **ESPECIALLY at the computer**, check seat and feet! Especially at the computer watch how you use your neck, back, shoulders, arms, wrists, hands and fingers. Use free, healthy rotation of arm-hand-finger (**don't use wrist rests!**). **Computer keyboard should have the same body use as the same as a piano keyboard; we have the same body!**

As children grow, piano teachers need to **check again and again** on kids' lesson and **home seating**. Even though parents are taught how to do the seating, teachers still need to check. Until you go see for yourself, you never know what random factors can distort the setup! Perhaps a photo or a video could replace a home visit if necessary. Sometimes the seating is difficult for small children because they're so short. In order for their arms and hands to be over the keys, they need to sit so high that their knees jam into the bottom of the keyboard. We adjust somehow to make them comfortable and still sit well.

Sometimes instead of sitting, children can **stand** to play if, when they stand, their elbows are about the level of the key tops. Let them stand on carpet squares to be high enough, if necessary. When children stand at the piano, their feet, legs and back are in proper alignment. Then, when they sit again, they can remember and reproduce the alignment. This standing practice gives comfortable body balance over flat feet with free arms. Show them **how** to stand at the piano, **with forearms parallel to the floor**, and above the keys, with bottom of the elbow level with the top of the keys. The wrists, hands, and fingers are always **over** the keyboard (not hanging down and off). The wrist is a straight connecting bridge between hand and arm. When children grow too tall to have arms level when standing, they'll have to return to sitting practice.

Sometimes adults with very long arms have such low elbows that, to have the keyboard under their hands and the bottom of their elbow level with the key tops, they have to sit so high that their legs jam into the piano, just like the little kids. What to do? Raise the whole piano: put casters under

each piano leg. Always take time and effort to adjust the bench and the piano. Our sitting right can allow us to play freely and easily in comfort.

Playing the piano is a pleasure. It should feel good, and natural, and never hurt, never feel bad. Teach families that any discomfort should be noticed and reported right away. And corrected.

Open the piano so students can **see** the thin width of a piano **string**, and see the small size of the soft **hammer** which bounces off the string. They'll realize that the key, string, and hammer are very small compared with the pianist's body and hand.

Because the whole piano is big, students often subconsciously feel that they have to attack the piano to play it. We teachers have to change that impression. The structure of the piano is big, but the important fact to study is that **the key is small**, as is the hammer, and the string is thin. We have to let students see and think about just one thin string vibrating. Show them that we are working with such very small parts - the key, and its string, with a small soft hammer between them, moved by the key to bounce off the string. Since we are much bigger than they are, we can relax and work with gravity and momentum (we don't have to tense up for a struggle with a huge instrument). We can also just bounce off; we can let our arm-wrist-hand-finger bounce off the key.

To produce naturally ringing resonant tone, "good sound", "singing tone", we can merely **gently drop** into the key. When our body is aligned, free arm motion can transfer the weight of the arm to the string (via the hand, finger, key and hammer) to produce good tone through the drop. (We need not attack the piano, we need not hit the key, crash, bang, nor strike, poke, push, pull, dig, or slap; we need not tense ourselves, brace ourselves, or force anything). Instead, just drop. We can then bounce up from our drop (staccato) or stay IN the key to let momentum roll our finger and arm forward (legato). Piano **technique should always feel good**, and feel natural. Thus, we produce natural ringing sound from each string.

We can **use our fingers** naturally, in the same ways they move when we reach to turn a doorknob, and when we reach to pick up a tissue with our thumb and fingers. **Fingers gently extend**, then, with gravity, arm weight gently drops. **The soft finger pad** makes contact with key, while momentum has the arm flow forward as the **finger rolls on its surface** (not sliding) to point of **balance**, balancing the hand-wrist-arm over the finger. **Thumb** moves toward the finger rolling on key. **Thumb is part of the hand unit**. Fingers-hand-wrist-arm in alignment have move forward together as a unit.

Wrist stays straight on top and sides (still flexible). (Wrist should not drop down from the hand. Wrist should not push up). When the finger is bearing arm weight, the wrist should stay level with the arm and hand, yet be flexible, like a cork on water. **Wrist is a straight bridge** which transmits weight from arm to hand. (Wrist can't transmit the weight if wrist drops down or pushes up, leaving the weight stuck in the wrist, so the hand and fingers are left "on their own to fend for themselves and therefore to get pushy and pokey trying to get sound). The straight wrist transmits weight through the hand to through to the finger, which transfers arm weight into the key as the key is depressed, which moves the hammer to bounce off the string.

When thumb is the player of the key, the fingers together can be part of the hand unit to **balance** the thumb, like a mitten. **Gravity and momentum** move the **weight** of our arm-wrist-hand-finger into and forward on the key which, when depressed, moves the hammer to bounce off the string, which is set into motion to vibrate and set **the air in motion** for ringing tone.

Good alignment yields good tone because it allows the arm weight to be transferred into the key by simply dropping into the key. (We don't need "strong fingers", nor do we need "curved fingers"). What we need is relaxed shoulders. We can have relaxed shoulders when our feet support our back.

Then our arm weight can be free to be aligned and transferred into the key. It's easy to work with gravity and momentum with an easily aligned body: arm-wrist-hand-finger aligned. We reach, drop, and roll for singing tone. We drop, roll, rock, and roll.

Q: When the children truly want lessons, which step would you take next?

a. You start lessons.

I suggest that you...

b. **ask the parents to have a "heart to heart talk" with the children** about commitment, responsibility, promises, and priorities. Have the parents tell the children that starting lessons means making a **big promise together**. This is a 3-part promise with a lesson part, a home part, and a recital part. Each part includes listening and playing. **For lessons**, we promise to listen to the music carefully, to listen to do as the teacher asks, to play, and to listen carefully to the other students' turns in the **lesson partner group**, their "**individual lesson group**", because the whole time is everybody's lesson. **For home**, they promise to **listen** enough to the assigned recordings everyday, and especially to their practice piece right before

they play it, to listen to their parents' guidance, and to **practice** their homework everyday, remembering that Dr. Suzuki said to practice every day that you eat. **Parents and children promise to work together** at this, always figuring out how to be kind, polite, understanding, patient, and respectful with each other in home practice. **For recitals**, they promise to come to listen to the others and to play for the others, for **mutual support** and learning, like sports team members are committed to fulfill group events. Parents and children need to realize that these commitments may mean giving up other things. **Both parents promise too. When parents are dedicated to this long-term project**, remembering first of all that Dr. Suzuki said this is **for the happiness of all children, and the children are saying, "I promise! I promise", parents call you to report.** Then you can ask parents to let the children ask you at the next lesson they observe, **"Will you teach me please?"**

- c. When the children ask you, you respond enthusiastically, **"Yes, I will love to teach you! First let's make a BIG PROMISE!"** and explain the promise. When the children and parents happily and wholeheartedly say, "I promise", you can make a Japanese promise by linking little fingers, and tell them when they can start having their own individual lesson. **Ask them to listen to Twinkle Variations many times every day, in addition to the rest of Book 1. Pianists:** instruct that **some of daily listening be at the piano, to prepare listening within practice**, especially to listen to the piece right before playing it. This lets them hear what they are trying to do right before they do it. This gives independence to the children. They can choose to hear the piece when they need to, on their own, right before practicing it. This also prepares them to **play along with the recording**, one of Dr. Suzuki's special goals for students. Ask families also to make a system of listening to each of the more advanced books. When they progress to the advanced books, they still **keep listening to the earlier books, to remember ALL their pieces!** We learn **how to play better** by working **with our old pieces**. Old pieces get easier and easier, so our playing becomes more fluid. As we **all** keep playing this common repertoire, the playing ease, beauty, and joy in playing keep rising for everyone.
- d. **Ask parents to bring to each lesson a special lesson notebook for taking notes, and a recorder** for recording sounds of the lesson for home listening. Ask parents to obtain recordings of the best performances of the music in all the books, to let the children memorize the advanced music in advance. Ask parents to be ready, once their children start lessons, to know which is the new song being learned, so they can program it to repeat, for mastery. And (privately) ask the parents to frequently **tell the story of how the children were wanting lessons SO MUCH**, and how happy a time it was when they were finally able to start their very own lessons. Explain to the parents why the **children need to always remember this, that it was their own choice to have lessons**. Have the children and parents write down their story of their time "before lessons". They can illustrate it as a homemade book to keep and enjoy.
- e. **Once lessons begin, continue daily to create inspiration, motivation, and a rich sound and supportive social environment to nurture ability development** (not just at the start) for lifetimes of study, for long long-term motivation and satisfying progress. At every lesson, remind them to listen everyday at home to the study pieces, as a habit. Always ask them about their home listening and practice. And **let parents learn to break down tasks into easy steps** to allow the children happy mastery. **Let parents remember** how they confidently waited for their children to talk and walk at their own pace and in their own way, the natural **mother tongue mother foot method**. Remember how they enjoyed baby talk and babywalk. Let them have this same confident, understanding, patient, **peaceful parent's heart to appreciate the small steps** of their **children's hands making music** on the instruments! When families are prepared like this, the way to the children's smooth and happy progress is clear, and all the **parents and children will help to inspire each other**. And they will inspire YOU, TOO!