

Haruko Kataoka Video Lecture

Suzuki Piano Method (Book 1) Tape (Video)
Haruko Kataoka, Matsumoto, Japan

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Hello to everyone. Today I would like to talk about the Suzuki Piano Method. I suppose everyone already knows a lot about The Mother Tongue Method because they heard Suzuki's speeches and read his book.

Everywhere in the world children learn their Mother Tongue by imitating their parents just naturally. I think none of us thought it was a very difficult to learn our own Mother Tongue as a child or none of us gave up learning the Mother Tongue because it was too difficult. Everyone is able to learn the Mother Tongue while they are still very young. For children it's a very natural thing to speak a language and learn a native language but for foreigners it's very difficult to learn a different language. Suzuki –sensei thought about these facts and he transmitted these ideas to music education. Therefore, this method is for the purpose of educating every child to a high ability depending on the method. You can educate every child (it's not the child's responsibility) if the parents, teachers and everyone in the surroundings are good educators. THEN, the education will be good.

The traditional piano method teaches children piano using [written] notes. That's why even if you work very hard in the traditional way you don't [may not] get much out of the education. Suzuki says you don't teach a young child how to write before he learns how to speak the language. Later you can teach him how to write and to read. You teach a child to read only after he has much practice in speaking. That's why he is very skillful in his Mother Tongue.

In the Suzuki Method, in the beginning, you LISTEN ONLY. A child when he learns the Mother Tongue LISTENS ONLY for about one year. Then the child starts gradually, little by little, speaking. It's the same in this music method. In the Suzuki Method, the most important thing is to have the children LISTEN. Children learn their Mother Tongue by listening to it and repeating, repeating, repeating. When a child learns a new word and he's able to speak it, parents or friends just repeat that word and the child enjoys speaking it. The Suzuki Method is based on the same principle. Therefore, the most important thing in the beginning for a Suzuki teacher is to talk to the parents and make sure they have the child listen to the record ALL THE TIME.

I think now everyone knows about the Suzuki Talent Education [Ability Development] Method, so I will talk about how to start the first piano lessons. At first, I talk to the parents or maybe only the mother and the child, and make clear to them that the Suzuki Piano Method really IS DIFFERENT from the traditional. I ask them to listen to the record ALL THE TIME. Repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly. Only once a day is not enough. I will ask the mother to play the record for the child all the time while she is in the house.

Then in my piano class, the thing in the beginning is OBSERVATION. I have them observe for one month. That's not such a problem because it's only once a week or maybe twice a week. This observation is very important--much more for the child than for the mother. The mother has already decided that she wants piano lessons for her child, but the child must understand what he will be doing in the classroom and must observe what's going on. In observing lessons, it's important not to observe too advanced students or students who are much older because it doesn't work. It should be in the same age group so the new child can learn from the other children and feel he's doing the same. Please have your beginners listen to other students who are beginners themselves or play pieces from Book 1.

I think observation means to come into the classroom quietly and listen quietly. If the child is not accustomed to being very quiet it's alright to observe for just a short time to teach him to get accustomed to it. My experience is that even children who have difficulty being quiet will understand what's going on after three or four times. Then during the observation period I ask the mother to begin [continue] listening at home to Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star and the next pieces in Volume 1 as much as possible. Just while they're doing other things, have the music around all the time. Repeat, repeat, repeat.

After [the beginning] observation, the piano lessons start, and I think it's very good if a few children start together in a group. Then, of course, all the children in the group observe each other's lessons as well as take their own individual lesson. I ask up to the third and fourth volume for the children to stay in the group and not to have their own private lesson. If students have only a private lesson and don't observe the others, they make very slow progress. For the mothers, they often learn more about how to teach their child at home and what it's all about from seeing the other children's lessons than their own child's.

Then after the beginning observations the lessons start.

First of all, the BOW. There doesn't [may not] seem to be much meaning in this very traditional Japanese bow. Suzuki likes to see this as a sign of respect – not only the pupil for the teacher but from people to people. It's also a greeting. It's a warm feeling to greet each other before the lesson begins. Before actually playing the piano, it's important that the teacher find out if the child is able to listen. [by seeing if the child will pay attention to the teacher's bow instruction?] What can he absorb, pick up? It's all about ability- Ability is something you get, not from studying very hard, but from instinct [reconsider translation-what do they mean by instinct?]. Of course, with language, you think about what you are going to say, but you don't think about the process you went through to learn how to speak. Everyone can do this [learn to speak?] naturally [instinctually?]. Suzuki-sensei says the problem is how do you get these abilities That's what it's all about. [This paragraph is important, but may not be clearly stated here].

Suzuki Method lesson means you develop these abilities in music one by one. It's important that the child is able to pick up what the teacher wants and, in the beginning, it's the BOW. That's the first step. Even before the bow it's important to be able to stand up correctly. And then I teach the bow. I ask the mother to repeat this every day with the child. Then I ask the child the next week when he comes-Can you do your bow this week? The child realizes that this is a lesson. If the child's not able to bow properly yet it's also the homework for the next week. In my experience, there are many children who are not able to making a bow during one month or even longer than that. It's not that children who can't do that aren't [won't be?] able to copy things from the teacher. It's very important to develop these abilities step by step. NEVER GIVE UP because in my experience children who were not able to do the bow for a long time became very, very good students later.

Normal [traditional] education gives a lot of abilities to learn at the same time and that's why they can't [may not] develop. Suzuki Method gives one step at a time and they should master it step by step. Then after they are able to do the bow, they are able [allowed] to sit at the piano. Now I

have them practice how to get ready. I want to show you how I teach a child to bow. This child has had only one lesson – last week.

From now on – lesson on HOW TO BOW:

Dialog follows: How old are you? Answer: 4 years old.

Please put your feet together.

Very good.

Now try to bow.

If you greet someone you stop like this.

Very good.

You studied a lot with your mother this week.

Because you're so good at the bow, we can sit at the piano.

Now I have to talk a little bit, is that O.K.?

At the first lesson you have to teach the mother about the height of the chair and the height of the footstools that you use. Then have the child's hand on the keyboard – elbow a little away from the body to have it free and height of the chair as shown. Sitting properly in the beginning is very difficult. Now we get ready. (Kataoka-sensei puts pupil's thumb on the key and asks him to look at his thumb.)

Dialog follows: Please don't play. Is that O.K.? Only LOOK.

Now I'm going to count. 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10.

Very good.

Do you know your finger numbers?

1,2,3,4,5.

Very good. (Game with mixing up fingers follows.)

Once more, let's get ready.

Don't move.

Because it's very good let's play one tone.

Very good sound.

Today's lesson is over.

Please bow.

Thank you very much.

Go back to your mother.

This child who started last week has an older sister who has studied for 2 ½ years. She's about 6 or 7 years old. He observed a lot because he came to his sister's lessons. That's a very good idea. Children who observe a lot know what you are talking about and are ready to do it after you ask them one time. Some children cannot do this much in one week. To "get ready" is one of the most important things in the beginning. Don't go too fast into having the child make sounds at the piano because "getting ready" in the right position and the beginning steps you see here should not be neglected. This part is very difficult for the children.

As an adult you learn much differently than a child. For example, just standing in one position is quite a difficult thing for a small child to do. Like standing in the right position for a bow. With little children their balance is not that good, just like with old people. So please don't take for granted the "getting ready" part. Teach this very, very carefully. Then say to the child, "Don't move your hand and look at your first finger." This is a very difficult thing for the child. The pupil you just saw was very good because I could count to 10 and he didn't move, but normally you count to "2" and their eyes are wandering and they are not able to watch their thumb. So make this homework. If they are 3 years old, make the homework counting to 3. And please praise the child very much. If a baby learns to speak and can speak one word, everyone is very happy and praises the child. Then the child will want to learn more. If they can do it, praise, if not, teach them again. Don't say, "You could do this yesterday, so you can do it today." That doesn't work with children. Every day practice "getting ready". This is CONCENTRATION TRAINING.

The most important thing in playing the piano is to have your body balanced on the chair. So getting ready is not leaning into the keys but having your first finger ready slightly above the keys (a little touch is O.K.) The whole body should be in balance before you play. Some students take one month or more only to be able to do this. If they can do it, we can go on to the next step.

Then we start to make a sound. The teacher should take the pupil's hand and guide it to the most natural, clear sound. Hold the pupil's elbow with your left hand and the pupil's right hand with your right hand. The sound of the tone must be memorized by the pupil. Not only the shape, but the TONE.

A child doesn't learn to walk because the parent tells him – now you have to put your left foot in front of your right foot, etc. Because he's living with people that walk, he is gradually able to imitate them and do the same thing. Because it's not natural for people to walk on their two feet, it's something you must learn from your environment. Suzuki-sensei tells the story about the two girls who were raised by wolves and walked on all four limbs.

When teaching the piano, I try not to tell the students you must hold your hand like this or like that. I just show the most natural way. The problem is how the teacher plays Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star. It's the first experience the child is going to have playing the piano, so the sound you are going to make using his hand must be the best example for him to memorize and copy. Don't try to make a big sound, just a natural and clear one. Then if you repeat this often, they will be able to play it by themselves. They will have a very natural and relaxed way of playing.

In the beginning, I do only one tone. This is the homework for one week. [Only one key – C – with thumb playing Twinkle A rhythm]. I will not go on to the next finger until they can do this well with a good sound. While I am teaching this, I am still reviewing their finger numbers. I am not teaching them a lot of things at one time, but if they can play this first tone with ease, I go on. Please wait two or three weeks on the first sound if necessary. If they can do the first finger really perfectly, the next ones are easy. After they can do the first finger really perfectly, the homework for the next week is the rest of the first phrase (C,G,A,G,F,E,D,C0. Don't forget [remember], I ask the mother to listen every day to the Twinkle tape. After the child is able to stand, bow, sit, get ready, and make the first sound, I proceed to the other fingers.

I teach these points very carefully, and it takes a lot of time.

(Kataoka-sensei now demonstrates the remaining Twinkle Variations)

Variation B is very important because it introduces the long sound. I help the child again at first by holding his hand and helping him play the correct rhythm and sound.

Variation C – Please demonstrate a very soft, clear sound especially if the child is very small.

Variation D – This last one is the introduction of legato. Teach this very precisely. If the child can play legato from thumb to fourth finger, the rest is the same. Teach legato very carefully especially on repeated notes because you need this skill for the next pieces in Book 1. At this time be sure to review Variation B for the long sound. This kind of movement [C,C] (repeating one note) is one week's homework. Then the next step is C,C,G (1,1,4). If they can do this, the rest is just the same.

Now I teach the left hand the same way. The left hand is much more difficult- because most children are right-handed. Teach this little by little so they get used to it gradually. I don't teach these beginning unison pieces hands together even though it's in the book that way. It's too difficult and the children end up losing their good tone. I pay a lot of attention to the SOUND.

Lightly Row is easy if they listen to the record. Sometimes the mother says the child can't memorize – that only means they're not listening [enough]! I don't teach notes at the lesson. Everything must be memorized at home. I teach the mother carefully the correct fingering to use. Fingering mistakes are too hard to correct later. I teach carefully which fingerings to use in London Bridge, Aunt Rhody, and Long, Long Ago. After these pieces it becomes easier and they can learn one piece a week.

After the right hand is learned all the way to the end of Book 1, I begin hands together starting with Mary Had a Little Lamb. This is easy because the left hand is chords. After this I have them do Cuckoo. At the lesson I teach the mother how to teach these pieces hands together. If she watches carefully how I do it in these two pieces, after this she can do everything at home by herself.

Now you will see a child who started observing lessons in April and began formal lessons in May. She can play almost all of Book 1. She has studied for 6 months and is 4 years old.

Dialog follows: Let's bow.

What's your name?

How old are you?

Please sit down.

I think that chair's a little too low. Please get up.

Please get ready.

(A series of Book 1 pieces follows)

Please play this one (Allegro). It's difficult, though!

(A lesson follows using the Twinkle Variation A rhythm to demonstrate sound.)

Kataoka asks her to please practice this everyday.)

The lesson ends with Musette.

This child was able to memorize very quickly because she listened very much. Everyone can do this well if they listen. Dr. Suzuki says THE BEGINNING IS THE MOST IMPORTANT. Some people think just the opposite. Make the habit of studying every day and you can build their abilities. They must study with the mother every day. The lesson is very important but it's only once a week or maybe twice a week. You don't eat once every three days. You must practice every day that you eat. Suzuki says education is a question of doing it every day – so make this a habit. The mother doesn't understand at all, so the teacher must help the mother understand how to study at home. Like I say in the beginning to the mother – if you listen to the record a lot and do Twinkle the way I tell you it will be easy.

(The following dialog is how to teach Mary and Cuckoo hands together.)

Mary Had a Little Lamb is the easiest to put hands together.

Cuckoo – Sometimes the mother says I can't get them to play hands together. In that case, I have them do the first broken chord (c-e-g) in the left hand for one week's homework. The next week the second broken chord (b-d-g). After this, the measure with three half note and quarter note (e-g) and finally the ending (b-g-f-e). After this the child can play the entire left hand from the beginning to the end of the piece from memory. For hands together, only ask for the first note in the right hand and the first note in the left hand together for one week. Make sure they practice "getting ready" with fifth fingers in position before making a sound. Then PRAISE! When they can do this, add the left hand E. Show the student at the lesson how to hold the right hand fifth finger on G and move only the left hand.

During the lesson, I repeat and repeat to make sure the mother understands how to teach this at home. Tell the mother to do ONLY THIS every day for one week. All children can do this. During the lesson, I repeat this all the time. If they're not able to play Cuckoo very well when they go on to Lightly Row, they will get mixed up because the chord is the same but moves differently. And

the measure with the repeated D's and E's in the right hand must be taught very carefully for legato sound like Twinkle Variation D. Sometimes the mother complains that the child can't memorize, but if they teach too quickly, the problem is not with the child but with the teaching of [by] the mother. The child that played before [on this videotape] was able to play a new piece hands together every week. I repeat, you have to listen to the record every day or this is not possible. If you study English in Japan it's very difficult, but if you are in America, it's quite easy because you are hearing it all the time.

The most important things about teaching the first book are that the mother understands about listening to the record, how to teach right hand alone through Book 1, how to teach the child to memorize the left hand and put each piece hands together starting with Mary and Cuckoo. Then Book 2 will be easy for mother to teach even though the pieces will be harder.

Always ask for the Twinkle Variations at every lesson until Book 1 is finished and also ask for the piece they studied last week (review piece). I always ask for the same pieces and I always praise and have them practice more on them. Suzuki-sensei says it's always important to review everything previously learned or we can't realize our ability.

For the next volume, you can't ask for every piece at every lesson so have them play at least one review piece every lesson. Review is more important than new. The child's ability really shows in old pieces. When they go into the higher volumes, always ask for an old piece every week. In the case of the first volume, don't skip any pieces and please do them in order.

If you teach the way I have explained, in four years the results could be the same as the child you are going to hear now. She is 8 years old and has studied for four years. If the education is right, everyone could play on this level. She will perform the Fantasia in D minor by Mozart.