HELPING SUZUKI STUDENTS TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR MUSICAL JOURNEY

Presented by Cecilia Calvelo-Hopkins and Shu-Yi Scott at the 2014 Suzuki Conference May 24, 2014 – Minneapolis, MN

I. INTRO

a. Definition of the word "to learn" in Latin based languages (Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French), in English, and in Mandarin and Japanese.
b. Environment and its conditioning at the time of developing a sense of "ownership"
c. Importance of ownership: ownership is imbedded in any successful learning of a skill!!

II. POSSIBLE REASONS WHY INSTALLING A SENSE OF OWNERSHIP HAS BECOME MORE DIFFICULT IN THE RECENT YEARS

a. overscheduling
b. too little time to decompress and/or process daily events
c. too little time to practice well (practice can easily become one more thing on a long list of things to do and therefore can be done monotonously or running though pieces without careful attention to details or mastery of skill)
d. parents' attitude towards "results" or "outcome" (i. e. how many pieces the student has learned within a period of time instead of skill-based concept about how WELL are they playing)
e. Suzuki triangle out of balance
f. changes in family life (teachers should be aware of any family factors affecting the quality of practice)
g. pressure of external standards of "success" (ranking, placement level, chair tests, regional music contests, etc.) making musical learning like any sports race or competition

III. OWNERSHIP IN THREE STAGES:

a. How to help children obtain ownership in different stages of life (inspired by an article titled "Mom, I Want to Do it Myself!" written by Dr. Jeanne F Brazier from the American Suzuki Journal) Stage one- primary school age, stage two- preteen, stage three- teenagers
b. Stage one: the importance of music listening and the child-parent-teacher triangle. Avoid over-praising. Honing the grit (1 trial vs. 20 trials)
c. More challenges are expected for pre-teen and teenage stage
d. Technically how to help students gain a sense of ownership in daily home practice and weekly lessons.
e. Brainstorm: as teachers, how to convince parents the importance and tactics to foster ownership.

IV. CONCLUSIONS:

a. All children are born curious and with a true desire to learn (therefore to own that which is being learned). It is the environment that they grow in that will keep that desire to learn intact or not. Caring for that "desire" and the ownership that

occurs when they do learn something meaningful is part of our job as Suzuki parents and teachers.

b. Benefits of recognizing the importance of ownership for both parents and teachers (not to mention the students themselves!) and therefore the need to be in tune with our children´s emotions. As soon as we start seeing signs of lack of interest or engagement we need to change the strategy. We do not want to wait until apathy becomes the norm.
c. Like in any process there will be ups and downs in the Suzuki path (degrees of ownership may fluctuate a little, just like the desire to practice may be higher or lower at different times). However, "ownership" should be kept under check at all times because it is so fundamental to the learning of any skill. Also, it is a good indicator of how we are carrying out the method so we can use it as a measuring tool (it tells us a lot about the student, about how the triangle is doing, about how the practice is going on at home, etc.)
d. By fostering this sense of ownership, we are helping build a child's identity and self-esteem and this will eventually translate into a happy human being with a noble heart!

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Poem on Children, from The Prophet by Khalil Gibran

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

and though they are with you, yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts.

For they have their own thoughts.

You may house their bodies but not their souls,

for their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow,

which you cannot visit, not even in your dreams.

You may strive to be like them, but seek not to make them like you.

For life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.

You are the bows from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.

The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.

Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness;

for even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He loves also the bow that is stable.

Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931) Lebanese artist, philosopher, and writer. Gibran immigrated with his family to Boston in 1895 and later settled in New York City. His works, written in both Arabic and English, are full of lyrical outpourings and express his deeply religious and mystical nature.