

DIRECTIONS FOR TEACHERS

LISTENING SECTION

COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH

Friday, June 18, 1999—9:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m., only

BE SURE THAT THE LISTENING SECTION IS ADMINISTERED TO EVERY STUDENT.

- 1 Before the start of the examination period, say:

Do not open the examination booklet until you are instructed to do so.

- 2 Distribute one examination booklet and one essay booklet to each student.

- 3 After each student has received an examination booklet and an essay booklet, say:

Tear off the answer sheet, which is the last page of the examination booklet, and fill in its heading. Now circle “Session One” and fill in the heading on each page of your essay booklet.

- 4 After the students have filled in all headings on their answer sheets and essay booklets, say:

Look at page 2 of your examination booklet and follow along while I read the **Overview** and **The Situation**.

Overview:

For this part of the test, you will listen to a speech about the Suzuki method of teaching violin to children, answer some multiple-choice questions, and write a response based on the situation described below. You will hear the speech twice. You may take notes on the next page any time you wish during the readings.

The Situation:

Your school board plans to add violin instruction to the music program in your district. Your music teacher has asked you to write a letter to the school board explaining the Suzuki method of violin instruction and recommending whether *or* not this method should be taught in your district. In preparation for writing your letter, listen to a speech by John Holt about the Suzuki method. Then use relevant information from the speech to write your letter.

Now I will read the passage aloud to you for the first time.

- 5 Now read the passage aloud with appropriate expression, but without added comment.

Listening Passage

One day it occurred to Suzuki that since all Japanese children had the intelligence and skill to accomplish the difficult task of learning to speak Japanese, they could, if they wanted to, learn to play the violin in the same way. Since he believed that children's lives would be much enriched by music, he set out to devise a way of learning the violin that would be as close as possible to the method children use to learn their own language. He realized that children had to hear a lot of other people's speech before they could make their own, and that they did a lot of speaking before they did any reading or writing. He also realized that children want very much to do what they see the adults around them doing. From these sound insights he developed his method. If Japanese parents wanted their child to study violin by this method, when the child was still a baby they would begin to play at home, every day if possible, and many times each day, recordings played by expert players of some of the simple violin tunes that the child would later learn to play.

When the child was about three, one of the parents, usually the mother, would begin taking violin lessons with a Suzuki teacher, *bringing her child with her*. The teacher would give the mother a violin, show her how to hold it, and then play one of the tunes that the child already knew. Then the teacher would show the mother how to play the tune. After the lesson the teacher would tell the mother to practice that little tune at home until the next lesson. Then, in perhaps the third or fourth lesson, if the child were still really interested—for Suzuki insisted that he would not force children to play—the teacher would mysteriously produce from somewhere a tiny child-sized violin, asking the child, "Would you like to try it?" Yes, indeed! So the mother and child would go home together with their violins, and would play together the little tune they both knew.

As time went on, the child would learn other tunes, and along with individual lessons would play in groups with other children, discovering with delight that they, too, knew the same tunes.

In the original method, only after children gained considerable fluency on the violin, and could play fairly complicated tunes, were they introduced to the written notes for the tunes that they already could play. Not for some time would they start learning new tunes from written notes instead of by ear. Children were encouraged to experiment with their instruments, to make sounds both fast and slow, high and low. They were asked to make sounds "like an elephant" or "like a little mouse." All over Japan, hundreds of four-, five-, and six-year-old children taught by these methods gathered to play music by Vivaldi, Handel, and Bach.

A few years later, when a group of these children came to the New England Conservatory on a tour of the United States, I was there to hear them. The children, perhaps twenty of them, came onstage, healthy, energetic, and happy. Dr. Suzuki and a young assistant checked the tuning of the children's violins. We waited in great suspense. What would they play?

Dr. Suzuki gave the downbeat, and then away they went—playing not some easy tune but the Bach Double Concerto, in perfect tune, tempo, and rhythm, and with great energy and musicality. It was breathtaking, hair-raising. I could not have been more astonished if the children had floated up to the ceiling. Rarely in my life have I seen and heard anything so far beyond the bounds of what I would have thought possible.

Suzuki instruction in the United States today is very far from the method that I have just described, and even farther from the method by which children learn to speak their

own language. The material to be learned is broken down into many very small pieces; each one is supposed to be done perfectly before the next one is attempted; mistakes are corrected instantly, from the outside, by the teacher or parent; there is considerable pressure put on the children to “practice”; and children are given little room or encouragement, if any at all, to improvise and experiment with the instrument.

Some of the reasons for this probably have to do with the differences between Japanese and American family life and culture. It is also important to note that not all Suzuki teachers are alike, any more than are any kind of teachers. On the whole, though, it is safe to say that Suzuki instruction in this country has become very rigid. And whether because of this or for other reasons, it certainly is not producing the kinds of results that we were told it once produced in Japan.

The fundamental insight of Suzuki, the living heart of his method, is that just as children learn to speak by trying—at first very clumsily—to make some of the speech they hear others making around them, so children can best learn to make music by trying to play on their instruments tunes they have heard many times and know.

Some Suzuki teachers may be in danger of losing the point of this fundamental insight. Children learning to speak do not learn to say one short word or phrase perfectly, then another phrase, and so on. They say a great many things, as many as they can, and with much use and practice learn to say them better and better. However, it looks as if some Suzuki students are being taught to spend a long time learning to play one or two simple tunes “correctly” before moving on to something else. When I hear children doggedly sawing away at “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” all in the first position and using only the lower half of their bows, I don’t feel much of the spirit of excitement and adventure that I hear when children are learning to speak.

All in all, the Suzuki materials and organization can be a very useful resource—*one of many*—for children learning music. The trick is to make use of those materials, but not restrict oneself to them. Branch out: encourage the children to improvise freely, to make up tunes, to write down tunes, to write compositions for each other to play, to begin as soon as possible to play real chamber music.

In short, put back into learning music the exploration, the discovery, the adventure, and above all the joy and excitement that are properly a part of it, and that too formal and rigid instruction can only kill.

6 After reading the passage aloud once, say:

You may take a few minutes to look over **The Situation** and your notes.
(Pause) Now I will read the passage aloud a second time.

7 Read the passage a second time.

8 After the second reading, say:

Now turn to page 4 of your examination booklet, read the directions, and answer the multiple-choice questions. Be sure to follow all the directions given in your examination booklet and your essay booklet. You may now begin.