

## Setting up a new Suzuki programme (EXAMPLE)

The following paragraphs set out the key issues to be considered when establishing a new Suzuki Programme. The exact approach taken will need to be adapted depending upon whether you are teaching privately or in a school environment.

- **Documentation**

Before commencing teaching either privately or in schools, you should be able to demonstrate you have a valid Disclosure and Barring Service certificate. It is important that anyone wanting to work with children can prove that they have not been barred from doing so and are therefore suitable to work with children.

Also, you will need to make sure that you have appropriate public liability and indemnity insurance to cover you when teaching both individual and group lessons. This can be arranged independently or through appropriate organisations such as the European String Teachers Association (ESTA).

- **Teaching in schools**

When teaching in schools either privately, or through a Music Service provider, it will be vital to build a rapport with the school from the start, so that you have the freedom to tailor your teaching in order to enable all of the key Suzuki elements to be put in place.

In most schools, children of all ages will be starting violin lessons simply because they want to learn the violin, not because they have specifically chosen to learn violin using the Suzuki Method. Initially there will therefore need to be a lot of communication with the school, and parents, to explain how the Suzuki method works, to outline the key benefits of the method, and to help parents understand the key role they will play in their child's learning.

In schools it is not always possible to teach children on a one to one basis, and more often than not, learning takes the form of group lessons. Here it is important to plan activities that keep the children engaged and motivated and which help all children to develop at their own pace, whatever level they are at. Planning for differentiation is important here.

The success of a Suzuki programme in schools also depends on getting commitment from the school, and parents, that parents will attend their children's lessons. This ensures that the Suzuki model of parental involvement can be maintained and allows parents to be central to their child's learning, which is such an important aspect of the method.

Even where children are being taught in small groups in schools, rather than individually, this is still incredibly valuable as it teaches vital skills of taking turns, listening, teamwork, motivation and ensemble playing. However, children can benefit further still from being invited to attend Suzuki activities outside of school, such as group lessons and workshops, enabling them to experience the full range of the Suzuki experience.

- **Who will you teach in your private studio?**

Before setting up your programme you will need to consider what kind of students you are willing to take on. Will you take on everyone who approaches you, or are you only interested in taking students younger than 4 years old where you can really apply the Suzuki principles of teaching very young children?

When advertising your new Suzuki programme it would help to clarify the type of student you are looking to teach, and also whether you have any expectations of them before they begin lessons. For example, will you require them to come and watch a number of individual and group lessons before beginning lessons, will you expect them to listen to the cd everyday for a set number of days before they begin lessons, and will you require them to purchase a particular type of violin in advance of lessons starting, or are you happy for them to select their own choice of violin?

The more information you can provide to parents about your expectations before lessons commence, the better informed they will feel. It may therefore be beneficial to set up a meeting with the parent and child before teaching commences to make clear the key elements of the Suzuki Method, and to answer any questions they may have. Asking parents and children to observe other individual and group lessons is a great way for families to see the Suzuki Method at work – to see how effective it is and to enthuse them to commit to lessons.

- **Where will you teach?**

In order to begin effective teaching, it is important that you have identified a suitable teaching area. Most teachers will teach from their own home, keeping a dedicated area or room in their house where lessons will take place. This will need to be free from distractions and have enough room for teacher, child and parents to comfortably work together.

In some cases, you may be asked to visit a student's house in order to teach them there. If so, you will need to consider whether this is practical – will you have all the necessary equipment you need to teach effectively – eg piano, teaching props – is their house free from distractions, how far is it to travel, will you need to include travel costs in the lesson price etc?

Once your Suzuki programme becomes established, and you begin to deliver group lessons, you will also need to ensure that you find a suitable venue that lends itself to providing group lessons. This could be a hall that is hired privately at a community centre, church hall or hotel. The space will need to be large enough to accommodate a group of children and parents, where there is room to move around, set up instruments and play musical games.

It would also be beneficial to have a piano at the venue so that children can be accompanied. The availability of a piano would also make it easier to use the venue for solo concerts and group performances.

- **How often will you teach?**

Here it will be important to differentiate for parents between the frequency of individual and group lessons. It will be important to emphasise to parents that attendance is required at both.

Ideally, individual lessons should take place once a week, in order to ensure that motivation is maintained, that there is a commitment to practicing and coming to lessons and to ensure a steady level of progression. The length of the lesson will be dependent upon the age of the child. It is unlikely that a child of 2 years would be able to concentrate for more than 15-20 minutes.

The frequency of group lessons is likely to depend upon the number of individual children having lessons, as a Suzuki programme in its infancy with one or two children, is unlikely to need weekly or fortnightly group lessons.

In this case you will need to decide whether you will expect your students to attend group lessons run by other Suzuki teachers in your area, until such time as you set up your own group lessons.

However, to be most effective, children should attend group lessons at least every month, more often if possible. The value of group lessons should not be underestimated and it needs to be made clear to parents that group lessons are just as important as the individual lessons themselves.

- **Lesson fees**

The amount charged per individual lesson is a personal decision for each teacher, but ought to be priced similarly to other qualified Suzuki teachers in your area in order to be competitive and comparable.

The cost of group lessons will tend to be driven by the cost of venue hire and the time commitment of the teacher, but again, the cost needs to be balanced against the fact that parents are already paying for a regular weekly lesson.

Lesson policies will need to be clear about how fees will be charged (eg weekly, monthly, in advance or arrears, payment methods etc) and what happens in the event of lesson cancellations.

- **Setting Expectations**

In addition to setting out policies from the outset that cover issues such as the kinds of students you are looking to teach, your expectations for lesson frequency, location and fees, it is also vital to be clear from the outset about expectations of the student and the parent.

Parents will need to understand that their attendance at lessons is essential to enable them to become an effective home teacher between lessons. Parents should understand that they

will need to make notes during the individual and group lessons so that they have all the tools necessary to help their child practice when the teacher is not there.

It is important that parents understand from the beginning, how often and for how long you expect them to practice with their child at home. They also need to understand that the parent is central to practice at home, and should be encouraged to ask for help and guidance if they feel they need it, on how to maintain a positive environment at home during practice sessions.

- **Maintaining momentum**

Once your Suzuki programme is established, it will be important to maintain a positive environment in your studio to maintain the enthusiasm and motivation of your students and their parents.

Group lessons and performance opportunities not only motivate students, but they also can inspire students who observe children further on in the repertoire than themselves. Encouraging parents to become members of the BSI will also open up the opportunities available for students and parents through having access to the national network of Suzuki workshops and performances.

The opportunity for Suzuki families to meet up regularly also creates an effective support network where parents can share ideas and experiences and learn from each other, which in turn adds to the strength of your Suzuki programme, benefitting all within the Suzuki triangle of teacher, parent, pupil.