Practice and the secret of how to become talented.

Everyone knows the old adage: Practice makes perfect.  Unfortunately, it isn’t true.  Practising any skill from yoga positions to playing any instrument does not make anyone perfect at acquiring skill.  *Practice makes permanent.*  The more one practices something, the better you get at doing that something the way you have repeated it.  This is excellent news when what one practises is practised the right way, and the really “ good “ way of doing something.

Eventually that ‘good’ way will seem to happen almost by itself, without much effort. This is seen as ‘talent’ in many many areas of life and especially in sporting areas where the body is being trained. Sadly, the reverse is also true.  Practicing carelessly, perfecting bad habits, also leads to an expert ability to do it wrong.  Practice is never neutral. It always leaves an impression on our neural pathways.  Dr. Suzuki says, *“Practice without thought is practice without progress.”* Therefore *how* we practice and *what* we practice should be carefully considered at each practice session.

**Learning the violin the Suzuki way**

Sometimes children, and parents too, think that***what*** piece they are on is a mark of musical prestige.  However, please remember that there is a difference between learning to play a piece and learning to play the violin.  Learning to play the violin  happens best on a familiar piece which does not require the player to think about notes, rhythm and bowing; thus freeing him/her to concentrate on improving and perfecting the technical skills necessary to play the violin well. Each piece teaches new techniques. Therefore, the more pieces a student can play “by heart”, without having to learn new notes, new bowing, and new rhythms, the better and—believe it or not—the quicker they will learn to play the violin and their new pieces.

**How to practise the best way**

Book 1 students should be playing every piece they know, every day.  Children from book 2 upwards should spend at least 3/4 of their practice time reviewing.  ***Everyone*** has technical weaknesses. These should be addressed at the beginning of the practice in a ‘warm up’ session. For example: Difficulty in maintaining a good bow hold. Play only open strings, or very easy familiar pieces while trying  to maintain a good bow hold throughout. This is best done as a ‘fun’ challenge and teachers are really good at helping you if you cannot think of how to do this. Some very small rewards could be offered for something like ‘if you can keep a good bow hold all the way through Twinkle theme”…. This is gradually extended over the coming days until it can be maintained for all the pieces. This sort of practice can be used for any type of technical shortcoming, i.e. posture, straight bows, etc.

Establishing that practice will ALWAYS start with technical ‘warm ups’ makes ‘right’ practice easier to achieve. Even if things deteriorate a bit as the pieces get more difficult, we will not, at least, have given the ‘wrong’ habits priority. After ‘warm up’ exercises comes review, doing one’s best to keep the good techniques already practiced. Then--if you still have the time (and, if you don’t, don’t worry too much)--practice the exercises your teacher will almost certainly have given you in preparation for, or as corrections of, the new piece.

To summarise in priority order:

1.Warm up; focusing single-mindedly on the technique needing improvement.

2.Review the old pieces while trying to maintain good technique.

3.Work on the exercises for the new piece.

4.Lastly start learning the new piece.

Dr. Suzuki himself was a late starter.  He was 17 before he first started to try to play the violin.  He was in his 20’s by the time he found a qualified teacher.  Guess what?  He didn’t play well.  It seemed to him that he had no talent. He made it his quest to find out what talent was and why some lucky people had it and others didn’t. And he found the answer.  Talent wasn’t something far off and mysterious, obtainable to only a few lucky ones in the lottery of life. It was something available to, and inside of, every ordinary person.  The secret of talent was *RIGHT* *REPETITION*. How many repetitions an individual needs varies with each person but that talent can be developed in anyone with this method is a given.

This brings me to the most important point of all:

Is learning to play an instrument the most important thing in the world?  No.

 Is learning *how* to learn important?

Yes.

Is proving to yourself and to others that you can master something as universally acknowledged to be as difficult as playing the violin going to make a difference in your assessment of your own potential  (even when you are a small child )?

Will that assessment help you to achieve anything you wish to in life?

***Please think about this.***

I think it will.

That, for me, has a greater meaning than learning to play the violin but, the perk is, they can play the violin too!

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