

Music Lessons for Life: Fostering Emotion Regulation through Suzuki Education

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Abstract

The Suzuki approach to music education encourages the development of new teaching practices that are consistent with the founding vision of Shinichi Suzuki. The purpose of this paper is to support teachers in this endeavor by identifying ways in which Suzuki education may foster emotion regulation in students, an aim consistent with Dr. Suzuki's goal of supporting the socioemotional growth of children. The paper reviews relevant developmental research and highlights those areas that intersect with the philosophies and practices of the Suzuki approach. One strong area of overlap stems from the principle that Suzuki education situates learning within a social context. The Suzuki approach places extraordinary importance on involving and coaching the parents of students, so it is significant that parental influences have been shown to impact children's emotion regulation. Research also indicates that peer collaboration and peer influences may foster children's regulatory abilities, in line with the dynamics that manifest in the Suzuki approach's required group classes. Additionally, early education has been found to promote emotion regulation, which corresponds to the Suzuki practice of starting students as early as age 3. Finally, this paper reviews existing research on the skills linked to emotion regulation and explores how Suzuki students exhibit those same skills. Examining the connections between Suzuki education and emotion regulation might expose possibilities for enlarging existing areas of overlap and for exploring new correspondences.

Music Lessons for Life: Fostering Emotion Regulation through Suzuki Education

Every time a child soothes her own frustration, or shifts her attention away from an unpleasant experience, or delays her gratification in service of a larger goal, she is demonstrating emotion regulation, a vital component in a child's social and emotional development (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2005). While researchers have not reached consensus on a standard definition of emotion regulation, the term is commonly used to describe the processes involved in monitoring and modifying the occurrence, intensity, and expression of emotions (Eisenberg, Champion, & Ma, 2004). This process of regulating emotions is distinct from the emotion itself, as noted by Cole, Martin, and Dennis (2004). For instance, consider a musician experiencing stage fright before a performance: *emotion* is what makes the musician want to run away and hide; *emotion regulation* helps the musician to manage his fright in order to walk onstage and perform. The purpose of emotion regulation is not to prevent or eliminate emotions, but to channel them in adaptive ways that serve an individual's social and emotional well-being (Izard et al., 2008). In this paper, the term "emotion regulation" will be used to refer to how children manage positive and negative emotions in their bodies and minds and how they act in response (Rydell, Berlin, & Bohlin, 2003).

One can hardly overstate the importance of emotion regulation in a child's life. Dwivedi (2004) identified emotion regulation as the principal component of mental health. Those strong in regulating emotions have better socioemotional functioning, meaning they have fewer internalizing disorders (e.g. depression and anxiety) and externalizing disorders (characterized by defiant and disruptive behavior) because they are better able to tolerate and manage their emotions (Dwivedi, 2004; Eisenberg, Champion, & Ma, 2004).

Cole and colleagues (2004) argued that emotion regulation accounts for how and why emotions facilitate or interfere with children's cognitive, behavioral, and social development. Emotion regulation is used as a measure of social competence, because children's ability to manage their feelings also influences their social interactions and relationships (Oncharwi & Keengwe, 2011; Raver & Zigler, 1997; Thompson, 1994). Because emotion regulation is linked to learning and academic success, Denham (2006) suggested using it as a measure of children's readiness for kindergarten.

Some researchers stress biological and temperament differences when evaluating individual variation in emotion regulation (Rothbart & Derryberry, 1981). Many others have identified extrinsic factors that influence the regulation of emotions, which will be the focus of this paper. The existing research on emotion regulation identifies supportive conditions that correspond exceptionally well to the structures of the Suzuki approach to music education, as is discussed below. Whereas some music education approaches divorce instruction from the social context, the Suzuki approach situates learning within the child's important social relationships with caregivers and peers. This context provides Suzuki instructors a unique opportunity to capitalize on children's social bonds in order to further musical and socioemotional development. The Suzuki approach also harnesses the benefits of an early education to develop regulatory skills that are closely related to emotion regulation. In this light, I propose that Suzuki education may be well positioned to foster children's emotion regulation alongside their musical development.

As Eisenberg, Champion, and Ma (2004) noted, there is a need for this type of inquiry in the field of social and emotional development. While the emotion regulation of children is a popular topic of study, most research has neglected to consider learning

contexts outside the home (Eisenberg et al., 2004). My hope is that by highlighting the ways in which emotion regulation is present in Suzuki education, Suzuki teachers can deepen their understanding of the broader goals of teaching and learning a musical instrument, and subsequently maximize music education's role in fostering lifelong social and emotional growth.

Music Education as a Pathway to Emotion Regulation

The need to support children's emotion regulation has been a focal point in the field of education, including music education (McClung, 2000). Perhaps due to the fact that music has the power to evoke emotional responses, Chamorro-Premuzic and Furnham (2007) found that some individuals seek out engagement with music specifically for the purposes of regulation. The regulating effects of music education were demonstrated in an experiment by Flohr, Miller, and Persellin (1996): children who received twice-weekly music instruction exhibited EEG activations indicating greater relaxation and lower levels of anxiety while completing three monitored activities, in comparison to children in a control group who had not received music instruction.

The Suzuki Approach

My interest in emotion regulation stems from my work as a Suzuki violin teacher. The Suzuki approach, developed in Japan by Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, is an educational philosophy used worldwide to provide instruction on playing musical instruments (Starr, 1976). Suzuki began teaching small children to play the violin in the early 1930's, developing a pedagogical system modeled on the processes he observed in children as they learned their first language, the so-called "mother tongue approach" (Starr). His goals as a teacher extended far beyond musical development; he envisioned instrumental education

as a means to nurturing well-rounded, noble human beings (Suzuki, 1983). Suzuki declared, “I just want to make good citizens. If a child hears good music from the day of his birth, and learns to play it himself, he develops sensitivity, discipline, and endurance. He gets a beautiful heart” (Suzuki, 1983, p. 105). Suzuki’s devotion to children’s happiness and education gained him worldwide recognition as a philosopher, educator, theorist, and humanitarian (Hermann, 1981). Before his death in 1998, Suzuki received nine honorary doctorates, a medal from The World Organization for Human Potential, and a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize (Hermann; Suzuki Association of the Americas [SAA], 2003).

The Suzuki approach is organized around three fundamental philosophies: that musical ability is developed, not inherited; that every child is capable of learning to play a musical instrument if provided with an appropriate learning environment; and that the extramusical skills developed while learning to play an instrument are equally, if not more, important than the musical skills (Suzuki, 1983). Dr. Suzuki’s philosophies informed key teaching practices in ways that are distinct from other approaches to instrumental education.

One salient characteristic of Suzuki education is the extent to which it revolves around parental involvement (Behrend, 1998). The parents, students, and teacher make up a unit known as the “Suzuki triangle,” in which each member is as important as the others (Slone, 1985). Another identifying trait of Suzuki education is the emphasis on peers. Besides weekly individual lessons, students participate in regular group classes (Starr, 1976). In addition, a Suzuki education typically begins earlier than other methods of instrumental education, with children often starting lessons at the age of 3 or 4 (Slone). This emphasis on an early beginning is not to say that older children cannot learn to play

an instrument, but rather that an earlier start is ideal (Slone). There are other components involved in Suzuki education beyond learning situated in a social context and starting children at a young age (and Suzuki cannot claim exclusive dominion over these pedagogical practices), but I will endeavor to show that these hallmarks of the Suzuki approach are primed to nurture the socioemotional learning that Dr. Suzuki advocated, particularly in the realm of emotion regulation.

To refer to the style of teaching that Suzuki educators practice as the “Suzuki Method” is not entirely accurate. Dr. Suzuki did not like the word “method” because he considered his philosophy and pedagogy to be continually progressing, and he believed the word “approach” was a better representation of this idea (Starr, 1976). He encouraged Suzuki educators to continually search for new and better ways to teach (Starr).

A prospective Suzuki teacher must first complete a standardized Teacher Development Program, as outlined in the course manual, *Every Child Can! An Introduction to Suzuki Education* (SAA, 2003). This manual, developed by the Suzuki Association of the Americas, accompanies an introductory training course that provides teachers with a thorough understanding of the basic elements of the Suzuki philosophy. The Teacher Development Program continues with a prescribed series of trainings led by SAA-registered Suzuki teacher-trainers. The trainings follow a common SAA-designed Teacher Education Curriculum, involving discussions, activities, presentations, and teacher observations. Upon completion of each unit, there is then a rigorous registration process for all Suzuki teachers and teacher-trainers.

It is my personal belief that Suzuki teachers, even with such comprehensive training, have yet to fully realize the remarkable scope of Dr. Suzuki’s vision, particularly in

regard to how Suzuki education might influence a child's socioemotional learning. Setting aside the topic of musical development—an area which receives ample attention in Suzuki journals, graduate programs and teacher-training seminars around the world—I will focus on the potential role of Suzuki education in shaping one basic building block for children's overall emotional development: emotion regulation.

Parallels Between Emotion Regulation and Suzuki Education: Social Context

To explore whether Suzuki education could potentially be effective in fostering emotion regulation, we must first pinpoint the conditions and practices that researchers have found to promote emotion regulation in children. The following sections will highlight areas of overlap between emotion regulation research and Suzuki education, providing academic evidence and examples from my own teaching.

It is clear from the research cited here that parents and peers influence the development of a child's emotion regulation. Significantly, Suzuki education situates learning in these same social contexts. I will begin by examining parent factors, and return later to the importance of peers.

Parental Influence and Involvement

The developmental research on parent dynamics (including family climate, parenting practices and observational learning and modeling) supports the intuitive argument that parents play an outsized role in children's emotion regulation. Parents are unusually prominent participants in Suzuki education, so it follows that Suzuki education's strongest influence on the emotion regulation of students might result from how it shapes parent dynamics.

Unlike other kinds of instrumental lessons in which parents drop children off and have little contact with the teacher, Suzuki parents are active participants in their children's learning (SAA, 2003). Suzuki parents are required to attend all lessons and take notes on what the teacher says and does (Sprunger, 2005). In their book *To Learn With Love: A Companion for Suzuki Parents*, Suzuki teachers Starr and Starr (1983) instruct parents to give their undivided attention during lessons, avoiding distractions such as phone calls, emails, and work projects. Teachers use individual lessons and group classes to communicate with parents about what and how children should practice at home (SAA). In this way, parents are educated to be the teacher's home assistants (Starr & Starr). As a widely circulated quotation from Dr. Suzuki asserts, "Suzuki education is parent education" (Mayors, 1999).

From an academic perspective, reviews of programs and interventions aimed at fostering emotion regulation in children conclude that such programs are most effective when educators and mental health practitioners involve parents in the learning and implementation process (Dadds, 2002; Elias et al., 1997; Weare & Gray, 2003). For example, Gottfredson, Gottfredson, and Hybl (1993) developed a successful program aimed at improving the behavior of students by involving their parents. Expectations for appropriate behavior were clearly communicated to parents and they were told how those expectations would be reinforced at school. Parents were then taught the same methods of positive reinforcement that were being used in school so that those techniques could be implemented at home, creating a congruency between home and school standards.

Observing and modeling parental emotion regulation. Research validates the common-sense impression that I have formed over the course of my teaching: that children

do in fact learn how to regulate their emotions by observing and modeling their parents (Morris, Silk, Steinberg, Myers, & Robinson, 2007). In particular, parental emotional profiles and interactions teach children which emotions are acceptable, and also demonstrate the expectations for emotion regulation (Morris et al.). Studies on two types of family environments provide evidence for this type of learning mechanism. In one study, parents who had frequent angry conflicts with their children or with each other were found to have children who observed and acquired maladaptive emotion regulation strategies (Brenner & Salovey, 1997). Similarly, some children mimic the interactions modeled by depressed parents (Garber, Braafladt, & Zeman, 1991). When observing depressed mothers and their children interacting during a problem-solving task, researchers found these mother-child dyads demonstrated more off-task verbalizations and less positive statements than non-depressed mothers and their children (Garber et al.). One possible explanation is that the children were modeling their mothers.

I have a 4-year-old violin student who clearly observes and models her mother's emotion regulation. Once, when this mother grew angry at her daughter's behavior during a lesson, she huffed, "I'm not dealing with this anymore," and stormed out of the room. A few weeks later, her daughter became angry herself during a lesson and raced out of my teaching room, down the stairs, out the door, and into the street—an unsafe emotion regulation approach for a 4-year-old, to say the least. The mother's earlier episode left no doubt in my mind as to where the daughter had learned that coping mechanism.

While these examples focus on maladaptive emotion regulation processes, research illustrates that children can also learn from their parents adaptive ways of regulating their emotions. A study on students' emotion regulation during homework demonstrated that

parents help their children regulate unwanted emotions by modeling coping and calming strategies (Xu, 2005). Along these same lines, Suzuki practitioners have long recognized that students will copy the behaviors and attitudes of their parents (Starr & Starr, 1983). For instance, in *The Suzuki Violinist: A Guide for Teachers and Parents*, Starr (1976) encouraged parents to leave their stress at the door when entering the lesson room. If the parents are relaxed and happy at the lessons, it is more likely that the children will be this way too (Starr & Starr). This is all to say that Suzuki parents are held responsible for the emotion regulation strategies that they model, a stance validated by recent research.

Parenting practices. In my teaching, I also notice that some children implement specific emotion regulation techniques that their parents have taught them. Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1997) posited that parents shape their children's emotional regulation through certain types of parenting behaviors and beliefs about emotion. These emotion-related beliefs of parents either lead to emotion-coaching behaviors (guiding or coaching children through the process of regulating their emotions) or emotion-dismissing behaviors (dismissing or disapproving of children's expression of emotions), which consequently affect how their children regulate emotions (Gottman et al.). In the authors' study, parents who demonstrated emotion-dismissing behaviors, such as mocking and criticizing while trying to teach their children something new, had children who were less able to regulate negative emotions such as anger, disgust, and sadness (Gottman et al.). Conversely, parents who saw negative emotions as an opportunity for teaching helped their children modulate their experiences of anger and sadness (Gottman et al.). As reported by Lunkenheimer, Shields, and Cortina (2007), emotion coaching and emotion dismissing interact in ways that can either emotionally protect children or put them at risk

for emotion regulation problems. In the end, the emotion-coaching parenting style has been associated with better emotion regulation in children (Gottman et al.).

Take, for example, a recent interaction between a mother and daughter in my violin studio. The 4-year-old student came to her individual violin lesson wearing a jacket with a bulky collar. Since the collar made it impossible for me to position the violin on her shoulder, I asked her to remove the jacket. She became upset, covering her face with her hands and refusing to make eye contact. Her mom stepped in and used active listening to get to the crux of the problem, her cues subtly coaching the girl to probe for her feelings and their root causes. The mother discovered that her daughter was simply embarrassed to take the jacket off unless she had privacy. That allowed us to easily and efficiently solve the problem, and we continued on with a happy and productive lesson. In this situation, I believe that the mother's emotion coaching supported her daughter's emotion regulation.

A study conducted by Stansbury and Sigman (2000) determined that 3- and 4-year old children used the same emotion regulation strategies as their primary caregivers when presented with two controlled frustrating tasks. Parents were observed for their use of specific regulation strategies (comforting behaviors, instrumental behaviors, distraction behaviors, and cognitive reappraisals) when aiding their children during these frustrating episodes. The children were seen to exhibit behaviors that were at least partially guided by the behaviors of their parents, confirming the notion that parents provide their children with strategies for regulating their emotions.

Parenting behaviors related to Suzuki education manifest most readily in practice sessions, since Suzuki parents are expected to practice with their children every day (Starr & Starr, 1983). Edmund Sprunger (2005), a registered Suzuki teacher-trainer and

psychotherapist, wrote a book dedicated to parents' concerns about practicing in which an entire section was devoted to the skill of acknowledging feelings. Instead of blocking feelings during practice sessions, Sprunger encouraged parents to acknowledge their children's emotions by active listening, empathizing and opening the door for further discussion. Sprunger's recommendations around practicing echoed Dr. Suzuki himself, who wrote, "Scolding does no good and should be avoided" (Suzuki, 1983, p. 28). The result is that positive emotion-coaching behaviors in both parents and teachers are deeply ingrained in the Suzuki approach.

Family climate as affected by parents. As families come and go from my teaching room, I sense the varying emotional climates that surround each family, and observe how those climates influence the children's emotion regulation. Researchers concur that a family's emotional climate has been found to impact a child's emotion regulation (Jaffe, Gullone, & Hughes, 2010). A family's emotional climate is reflected by the quality of relationships and the degree of positive and negative emotionality expressed in the family (Morris et al., 2007). Accordingly, Jaffe et al. reported that the presence of a nurturing and supportive caregiving environment was critical in children's development of adaptive emotion regulation patterns. Findings from other research, focusing on the parents of 3- and 4-year-olds, implied that maternal warmth was associated with children's effective emotional self-regulation (Dennis, 2006).

The attachment relationship between parent and child—described by Morris and colleagues (2007) as "a reflection of the emotional climate between the parent and child" (p. 369)—is bound to impact how a child regulates emotions. Research by Gresham and Gullone (2012) on the emotion regulation of children and adolescents examined the role of

attachment in predicting the use of two emotion regulation strategies. Although it should be noted that results were entirely based on self-reports, the authors found that securely attached children (as demonstrated by high levels of Communication on the Inventory for Parent and Peer Attachment) used healthy, adaptive strategies such as cognitive reappraisal to regulate their emotions (Gresham & Gullone).

While I am not measuring parent-child attachment with scientific inventories during my teaching, I have strong hunches as to which violin students have secure emotional attachments, and I notice correspondences to their emotion regulation. I have one 5-year-old student who seems to have a particularly close and trusting relationship with his mother. At the dress rehearsal before his first recital, I overheard him tell his mother that he was feeling scared about performing. Based on the nurturing tenor of their conversation, I could tell that the mother genuinely cared about her son's feelings, and it struck me as noteworthy that he felt so comfortable sharing his emotional concerns with her. The next day he arrived at the recital with a giant grin on his face, which remained there throughout his violin debut. In that situation, my guess was that the healthy parent-child attachment enabled the student to successfully regulate his performance anxiety.

Another component of family climate is represented by parental expressivity (Morris et al., 2007). Mothers who express more positive emotions tend to have children who can regulate their own emotional responses (Eisenberg et al., 2001; Eisenberg et al., 2003). Moreover, caregiver expressiveness and child emotion regulation are predictors for child behavior problems (Eisenberg et al., 2001; McCoy & Raver, 2011). Interestingly, mild or moderate amounts of parental negative expressivity may actually benefit children's emotion regulation (Morris et al.). In a study by Eisenberg et al. (1992), mothers'

expressions of nonhostile emotions, like sadness, were positively related to children's displays of sympathy. It could be that the exposure to a range of parental emotions might help children learn how emotions can be managed (Morris et al.).

Take, for instance, a mother in my studio who is highly emotive, both verbally and non-verbally. She is adept at using "I-statements" to share her feelings with me and with her children, and I am typically able to know how she is feeling from her communicative body language and facial expressions. Her children, both my students, are also quite skilled in using feeling words. But even more noticeable is the musical expressivity of her older son. At this early stage of his violin education—he is learning pieces from the first of the 10 volumes of Suzuki repertoire—his violin playing is imaginative and communicates emotional information. When he plays the Suzuki piece "Happy Farmer," for example, I hear in his rendition a genuine expression of joy! Might there be a link between this mother's expressivity and the expressive nature of her son's violin playing? Beyond the inherent delight of communicating through music, it seems that such expressiveness also provides a valuable emotion regulation function, as I discuss later.

Having examined research that links emotion regulation to family climate—as represented by such factors as parent-child attachment, parental expressivity, and maternal warmth—let us turn to Suzuki's perspective. In *Ability Development from Age Zero*, a book written for Suzuki parents, Dr. Suzuki (1981) argued that a warm, supportive, and nurturing home environment are the primary ingredients of a successful Suzuki education. He advised, "When we wish children to learn something, we must first create a willing attitude and a happy environment" (Starr & Starr, p. 33). Suzuki parents are taught to embody positive and affirming attitudes in order to encourage children's growth and

learning (SAA, 2003). While Dr. Suzuki often said that his approach was developed for the happiness of all children, his protégé William Starr remarked, “I really believe he meant for the spiritual enlightenment of all parents” (Slone, 1985, p. 44). Addressing Suzuki parents, Sprunger (2005) compared the emotional and musical growth of Suzuki students to the ways in which they grow physically: while the parents cannot do the actual growing for their children, they can provide the nourishment children need to grow. These efforts to encourage parental attachment, expressivity and warmth might seem commonplace, but I know of no other music pedagogy system besides Suzuki that openly states these priorities and puts them into practice.

Suzuki’s influence on parental dynamics. Suzuki parents are not left to grapple with parenting issues on their own, for a significant swath of a Suzuki teacher’s training is dedicated to learning techniques for teaching and coaching parents (SAA, 2003). From the outset, teachers discuss the detailed expectations for parents’ demeanor and discipline in individual lessons, group classes, and practice sessions (Slone, 1985). Subsequently, teachers carefully observe the emotional dynamics between children and parents and offer feedback when needed (Slone). Suzuki teachers are responsible for training parents how to work with their children at lessons and at home (Slone). One way teachers accomplish this is by modeling emotionally healthy behaviors and language during lessons. For example, a teacher-trainer once taught me an effective modeling technique for dealing with parents who would consistently arrive at lessons acting frazzled and distracted. I would find an occasion during teaching when I was personally feeling stressed out and speak out loud, “Gosh, I’m feeling so stressed out because we still have so much to cover and we’re running out of time. What should I do? I know—first I’ll take a deep breath. Then I’ll go

through our list and decide what's the most important. Oh, I see we didn't get to scales last week, so that's what we'll do today and everything else can wait until next week." Suzuki teachers are also trained to offer parents direct suggestions for improvement, while still encouraging them in their efforts (SAA). As K.C. Slone, another teacher-trainer, instructed, "Such suggestions should always be positive, and include support for the good job the parent is doing; reinforcement for the fact that he is, indeed, a good parent" (p. 38).

Besides direct coaching from teachers, a plethora of books, such as *A Suzuki Parent's Diary: Or How I Survived My First 10,000 Twinkles* (Morris, 2005), specifically address Suzuki parents' musical and nonmusical questions and concerns. Some Suzuki teachers distribute "parent packets" or hold parent classes for the parents entering their studio (Matsui, 1995). Additionally, every issue of the SAA's *American Suzuki Journal* contains at least one article for parents, and the SAA's website offers an online discussion forum, as well as an online program called Parents as Partners, so parents can receive help with their questions and concerns. While these efforts towards parent education are a good start, Suzuki teachers could still do more, as will be discussed in the recommendation section of this paper.

Peer Factors in Emotion Regulation and Suzuki Education

While ample research has examined how parents affect emotion regulation, more work is needed to uncover the importance of peer influences (Morris et al., 2007). Some of the significant findings thus far point to the importance of collaborative group activities in developing emotion regulation, as well as the sizable impacts of peer influences. While children can learn maladaptive strategies from their peers (Adrian et al., 2009; Dadds, 2002), they can also learn healthy ones. The prioritization of peer-centered learning (in the

form of weekly group classes) is perhaps the most tangible factor that distinguishes Suzuki education from other music methods, so any evidence of peer influence on emotion regulation deserves particular attention.

Peer collaboration. A Suzuki education involves regular group classes with peers, providing benefits that cannot be found in individual lessons (SAA, 2003). For one, playing in a group requires entirely different musical and emotional skills than playing solo (Slone, 1985). Additionally, children not only play together during group classes but they also learn by watching and listening to each other (McCall, 1993). Students also get to see their peers grappling with the same challenges and reveling in the same triumphs (SAA). For children who begin lessons at age 3 or 4, Suzuki group classes could be especially meaningful, because it might provide their first opportunities to work in a group setting with peers. Suzuki teachers are taught during training how to structure group classes to make the most of the cooperative learning context (SAA).

A study by Larson and Brown (2007) established that the peer context of a high school theater program impacted adolescents' emotion regulation. An essential element of a youth program is that activities are done in collaboration with peers, requiring young people to manage the emotional dynamics of peer relationships. The researchers used interviews to ascertain what youth learned about emotions from their participation in theater, and what role their peers played in this learning. Students described learning to manage their anger, stress, and elation, and presented peers as collaborators in this learning process. For example, it was reported that the students helped talk each other through anxiety and stage fright in the hours before the performance.

It seems as though such experiences with peers may provide a key to fostering emotion regulation. Gottman and colleagues (1997) speculated that the peer context provides children with opportunities to engage in cooperative activities based on more egalitarian relationships than adult-child relationships. Unlike adult-child interactions, peer interactions shift the responsibility for engaging, negotiating, and maintaining interpersonal contact to the child. This also means children become more accountable for regulating their emotions.

I have seen the effect of peer collaboration at work in a beginner-level group class consisting of four young students. While preparing for a recital, I used the final group class as an opportunity for the students to rehearse their solo performances in front of each other. The first soloist, a 4-year-old girl, decided that she was feeling too shy to perform, and she refused to practice her solo in front of the class. I told her that I felt sad about her decision because the class would not get to enjoy her beautiful violin playing. I then asked the students to raise their hands if they also felt sad or disappointed. They all raised their hands, and several actually asked the student to perform. When the resistant soloist saw that her decision was impacting her classmates, she rallied and proceeded to present her recital piece to a smiling and supportive audience.

Positive peer influences. Youth programs provide a context for studying the role of peer support as an external developmental asset (Anderson, Sabatelli, & Kosutic, 2007). Findings from a study on urban youth development suggested that youth intervention programs seeking to promote constructive emotion regulation should provide opportunities for young people to develop supportive relationships with peers (Anderson et al.). As part of a study interested in the peer-context variables related to how youth

manage their emotions, researchers found that friendship support was associated with adaptive emotion regulation patterns (Adrian et al., 2009).

These findings match my observations as a teacher. Several years ago, I began teaching a 4-year-old boy who would become quite distressed at the start of each group class, crying and holding onto his mother's leg. On one occasion, as this new student was crying loudly and appeared to be frozen in place, I watched a fellow student (with whom my new student already had a friendly relationship) walk over and hug the other boy. The struggling student soon stopped crying and was able to participate in the class, with no intervention required from me or from his mother. This incident demonstrated for me the potential for peers to assist each other with emotion regulation.

Another potential source of positive influence on children's emotion regulation is peer-oriented motivations (Xu, 2011). When analyzing variations in students' homework emotion regulation, one researcher noticed that survey respondents gave peer-oriented reasons for regulating emotions associated with homework (Xu, 2011). In line with such findings, others have also recognized that children's expectations about the interpersonal consequences for regulating their emotions subsequently alter their behavior (Saarni, 1985). There was evidence of this phenomenon in the school theater study referenced earlier: the researchers postulated that students learned to manage their emotions because those students recognized the impact that their emotional episodes had on other members of the group (Larson & Brown, 2007).

Japanese Suzuki teachers in particular have acknowledged the motivating power of peers (Starr & Starr, 1983). These teachers have stated that the behavior of the older Suzuki students as witnessed by the younger children had the strongest positive influence

on beginners (Starr & Starr). I have witnessed this form of peer influence in my own teaching as well. Towards the end of a group class, I introduced an activity that one of my youngest students found to be quite challenging. She sat down on the floor, crossed her arms, and scowled. I decided to end the class, and asked everyone to get in position for our traditional “thank-you bow,” the conclusion to each class. As the other students stood at the ready, my frustrated student remained on the floor. Eventually, her peers became restless and fidgety, until a fellow student encouraged her to join us. She did, and we were able to take our bow together as a group. I believe that it was this positive form of peer pressure that motivated her to manage her emotional state and behavior.

Taken together, the influences of peers and parents confirm the significance of learning situated within a social context, a distinguishing characteristic of Suzuki education. This topic alone makes a strong case for the link between Suzuki education and emotion regulation, but there are still other factors to consider; next I will examine the Suzuki practice of enrolling very young students.

Parallels Between Emotion Regulation and Suzuki Education: Early Education

Starting students at a young age is a hallmark of Suzuki education (SAA, 2003). In my studio, I generally only accept beginning students between the ages of 3 and 5, which is considered to be the ideal age for starting Suzuki lessons (SAA). In Dr. Suzuki’s words, “A child of three...is just at the stage when his personality is being formed and his abilities are being inculcated. ... It is precisely at this time that he must be educated with infinite care” (Suzuki, 1983, p. 107). He believed that Suzuki education would realize its greatest benefits—both in terms of musical development and socioemotional growth—when children begin at an early age.

Research corroborates Suzuki's assertion that the preschool years are particularly influential for shaping the development of emotion regulation (Beauchaine, Gatzke-Kopp, & Mead, 2006; Blair, 2002; Fox & Calkins, 2003). During a child's second year, children learn self-control and emotion regulation skills (Robinson, Emde, & Korfmacher, 1997). Then, around age four or five, children become increasingly aware of cultural display rules and start engaging different kinds of management processes such as deciding when and how to mask or control emotional expressions (Fox & Calkins). Suzuki instruction therefore starts at a time of rapid development in self-regulating abilities.

The early years present an ideal time for fostering emotion regulation, in part, according to McGinnis (1990), because children are more open to help when they are younger. Besides, children need regulatory skills when entering school, making preschool a crucial period for supporting emotion regulation (Blair, 2002; Trentacosta & Izard, 2007). Emotional and behavioral problems in preschool do not tend to dissipate over time (Robinson et al., 1997); rather, some evidence suggests that the ability to change negative behaviors decreases with age (Strain & Timm, 2001).

I have one student whom I would describe as possessing inadequate emotion regulation resources, and I am concerned about her readiness to enter kindergarten in just a few months. Her participation in group class has turned out to be very fortuitous at this stage in her development, because it has revealed emotion regulation challenges that are likely to arise in a school setting. Even more, group class has given her a controlled forum in which to practice emotion regulation with the help of her mother and her peers. Each time in group class that she deals with the negative emotions that arise for her from

standing in line, or sharing her belongings, or waiting to be called on, I feel relieved that her Suzuki involvement is helping to prepare her for future situations in school and elsewhere.

Early dysregulation is a precursor for behavior problems later in life (Eisenberg et al., 2001; Robinson et al., 1997). If children present signs of difficulty with emotion regulation, it is better to tackle problems early, while they are still relatively mild (Loeber, 1990). Consequently, emotion regulation intervention would ideally take place before age 5 (Beauchaine et al., 2006). In a review of programs geared towards emotionally dysregulated children, Dadds (2002) affirmed that successful interventions identified problems and intervened no later than preschool or early primary school years with child cognitive skills training, parent training, or both. It is worth mentioning that this finding only held true for externalizing disorders, which are characterized by problems with aggression and impulsivity (Dadds).

A study by Bidgood, Wilkie, and Katchaluba (2010) reiterated the importance of early intervention. A school-based emotion regulation program, The Supporting Tempers, Emotions, and Anger Management (STEAM) program, combines generalized emotion regulation with anger management in order to assist children with impulsive behavior and to decrease the frequency and intensity of anger. After 143 children participated in the study, results indicated that the program was effective in producing changes in emotion regulation skills, but that children in Grades 1 through 3 showed more improvement than children in grades 4 through 8. These findings point to the benefits of an early start in the development of children's emotion regulation since it appears more difficult to produce improvements in children's regulation as they get older. Such compelling studies lend support to early education, which is already entrenched in the Suzuki approach.

Parallels Between Emotion Regulation and Suzuki Education: Skills

My interest in emotion regulation rises from the emotional stresses I see my students face in their lessons—challenges that I know appear in other facets of their lives as well. Sometimes the only way a student can grow as a violinist is to apply her emotion regulation skills to an emotional hurdle by controlling attention, delaying gratification, or solving problems, to name several primary applications. Studies have probed how these particular skills relate to emotion regulation.

Attention Control

As noted by Eisenberg and colleagues (1994), attention and emotion regulation are related; in fact, attention control has been used as a measure of regulatory skills. In a study examining how children regulated anger, the authors hypothesized that the ability to shift attention would be useful in modulating levels of arousal, whereas the ability to sustain attention would reflect the ability to regulate behavior. Correlations were expected between attention control and constructive anger-related emotion regulation, and the results confirmed this hypothesis, demonstrating that 4- to 6-year-old boys rated highly in attentional control were more likely to use adaptive emotion regulation methods, such as responding to anger verbally rather than physically.

Research by Trentacosta and Izard (2007) points to bidirectional influences. Their findings suggested that children who could manage their emotions were then more attentive than other children, which predicted better academic competence. This led the researchers to advocate for efforts to enhance emotion regulation in early childhood as a way to benefit children's attention.

Just as maintaining attention corresponds to one aspect of emotion regulation, Hannesdottir and Ollendick (2007) found that healthy emotion regulation also includes the ability to disengage and redirect attention away from emotion-eliciting stimuli when needed. This is especially important for children attempting to regulate negative emotional states, because they can shift their attention to positive or neutral stimuli.

The first task of a Suzuki student is to develop the ability to shift or focus his attention (Slone, 1985). Dr. Suzuki (1981) believed that this was a skill that could be taught and practiced. Some Suzuki teachers work on this with beginning students by asking them to stand in place and make eye contact for as long as possible (Slone). This exercise requires the child to restrict his sensory input to the task of focusing (Starr & Starr, 1983). Many students can only maintain eye contact for a few seconds at first, so every week the teacher and parent work on stretching this time by a few more seconds, until the child can eventually focus his attention for the duration of the first Suzuki piece, “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” (Slone). This task requires self-discipline, a skill that will facilitate longer lessons and extended home practice sessions as the child’s concentration grows (Starr & Starr).

The connection between attention and emotion regulation was readily apparent during a recent lesson. My student, a 5-year-old boy, became highly irritated while playing his violin because he noticed a hangnail on one of his fingers. I was sure that if he could focus on something other than the hangnail, it would cease to bother him. For this particular student, all it took was a gentle reminder from me to focus on the piece at hand, and after successfully refocusing on the repertoire, he appeared content throughout the

rest of his lesson. This brief incident confirmed for me the regulatory benefit that stems from a child's ability to redirect his attention.

It happens that the connection between Suzuki education and attention has been studied: Scott (1992) set out to examine if 3- to 5-year-old children enrolled in Suzuki violin lessons would perform better on attention and perseverance tasks than students from other groups. Students participating in individual Suzuki violin lessons and students participating in individual plus group Suzuki violin lessons scored higher on all attention task variables than the students enrolled in creative movement classes, students enrolled in preschool classes, and students not enrolled in any kind of organized activities or preschool classes. Of particular interest, students receiving individual and group lessons spent significantly more time on the perseverance task than participants who were not involved in any musical instruction. It could be argued that the findings were due to selection bias since this study did not use random assignment. However, the provocative results seem to warrant future experimental study, perhaps comparing the attention and perseverance of students participating in Suzuki and non-Suzuki instrumental lessons.

Delay of Gratification

Delay of gratification is defined as “the pursuit of more attractive but temporally distal outcomes in the face of immediately available but less desirable rewards” (Peake, Hebl, & Mischel, 2002). The ability to wait for a desired object or activity is reasoned to be a component of emotion regulation (Cole et al., 2011; Santucci, et al., 2008). When children are able to shift their attention to an alternate object or activity, they are essentially regulating their anger, annoyance, or frustration (Cole et al., 2011; Santucci et al.). As a way of testing children's use of emotion regulation strategies, many researchers have used

delay of gratification tasks, such as waiting to open a gift (Cole et al., 2011), waiting to eat a cookie (Santucci et al.), or not being allowed to play with toys (Supplee, Skuban, Shaw, & Prout, 2009). Preschool children who demonstrate the ability to wait are seen as more cognitively competent, socially competent, verbally fluent, rational, attentive, planful, and better able to deal with stress later in life than their non-waiting counterparts (Mischel, Shoda, & Peake, 1988).

Suzuki education provides ample opportunities to practice delaying gratification. As the Suzuki Association of the Americas (2003) asserts, the Suzuki approach structures learning in small steps. While some children and parents are inclined to forge ahead and learn pieces before the necessary skills have been acquired, Dr. Suzuki warned, “Those who rush from piece to piece trying to play more advanced pieces will fail to foster ability and eventually drop out” (p. A15). Instead, the Suzuki approach advocates mastering each skill before advancing to the next piece or technique. This emphasis on small steps means that Suzuki students do not learn to play pieces quickly and sloppily. Rather, the Suzuki approach is structured to facilitate exceptional playing with gradual, methodical progress and ample repetition, requiring Suzuki students and parents to put instant gratification on hold.

Some of my beginning violin students model this skill better than others. Usually, when 3- or 4-year-old students enter my studio for their first lesson, they are expecting to play the violin immediately and have it produce a beautiful sound, similar to what they have heard at concerts or on recordings. They soon face the reality that the violin is a complex instrument, and that there are many skills that must be learned before they can play, much less play well. On average, my students do not play their first notes on the

violin until after they have been taking lessons for several months. Students are often unhappy about this delay, expressing feelings of disappointment and anger. The children I consider to be emotionally regulated are able to shift their attention to other tasks; they engage themselves, with varying degrees of assistance from me in the individual lessons and from their parents at home during practice sessions, in preparatory activities such as naming the parts of the violin and bow, balancing coins on their violins, and plucking the strings until they have acquired the requisite skills to begin playing their instrument. It is possible that this kind of practice may assist children in developing their ability to appropriately delay gratification.

Problem-Solving

Problem-solving training has proven valuable for teaching emotionally dysregulated children how to identify emotionally challenging situations and prepare adaptive responses (Hannesdottir & Ollendick, 2007; Marx & Gross, 1998). In these cases, children prepare for experiencing and responding to certain emotions by identifying emotionally charged situations, brainstorming courses of action, and picking a strategy to implement in future situations (Marx & Gross).

Problem-solving most obviously comes into play in a Suzuki education during practicing (Oare, 2011), a challenging activity often beset with negative emotions. During the early years of learning, parents supervise their children's practice sessions and provide instructional feedback (SAA, 2003). Then, as students get older, they are taught to take ownership of their own practicing (Behrend, 1998). The goal of instrumental practice is for students to make playing easier, which is accomplished by perceiving and analyzing

obstacles, creating solutions, and implementing changes (Starr, 1976). In this sense, practice is as much a mental exercise as a physical one (Starr).

As a Suzuki instructor, one of my responsibilities is to coach my students in the development of problem-solving skills. I am currently teaching a 4-year-old girl to play her first fingered note on the violin's A string. This is a challenging task as it requires complete coordination between the right and left hands. My student has had difficulty with this new note, and it has brought up frustrated feelings in her for several weeks in a row. At her last lesson, we talked about how her frustration was getting in the way of her learning. We dealt with her emotions by focusing her energies on identifying the problem. We tried a series of "experiments" to determine if the trouble was in her left hand, her right hand, or her posture. She identified that the problem was with her right hand, which was not moving to the A-string level quickly enough. She successfully made the correction, leaving her feeling proud and pleased. In order to overcome the frustration associated with the "yucky-sounding note," she needed to reengage her problem-solving skills.

Parallels Between Emotion Regulation and Suzuki Education: Summary

Many factors and skills associated with emotion regulation are also present in the Suzuki approach to music education. Suzuki education successfully exploits the social context of learning—the child-caregiver relationship and the peer relationship—to promote socioemotional and musical skills. Furthermore, current findings suggest that emotion regulation training should begin as early as preschool, which is also the suggested starting age for Suzuki students. Furthermore, the research points to a suite of emotion regulation skills that the Suzuki approach explicitly fosters: attentional control, delay of gratification, and problem-solving.

Unrealized Intersections Between Emotion Regulation and Suzuki Education

There are other aspects of emotion regulation that sync perfectly with Suzuki's founding philosophy but that have not yet been integrated into Suzuki pedagogy; these are areas where Suzuki teachers could adapt their methods to capture more emotion regulation benefit, as I will address later. This section will examine two such areas: the emotional impact of teachers, and the role of creativity and emotion expression.

Teachers and Emotion Regulation

Teachers may well socialize emotion regulation in the same ways that parents do (Brenner & Salovey, 1997). Xu (2011), for example, found that teachers' feedback influenced students' homework emotion regulation: greater emotion regulation was seen in students who received more feedback from their teachers. Since the people in children's social worlds influence the ways in which they respond to and handle emotions, it makes sense that teachers would be influential in developing children's regulation (Eisenberg et al., 1997).

What my students observe me saying and doing when I feel joyful or sad teaches them about emotion regulation. I also directly coach children in emotion regulation strategies. The other day, for instance, when a 4-year-old girl sprinted into the lesson room and jumped up and down while I attempted to tune her violin, I let her know that their excitement was getting in the way of her learning and that she needed to leave half of her excited feeling in her pocket so that we could begin the lesson.

Educators understand that they are teaching emotion regulation every day (Nellum-Williams, 1997). As part of the current educational movement towards more proactive approaches to classroom management, teachers are expected to influence and regulate the

emotional dynamics of individuals and groups (Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenberg, 2011). However, some teachers have expressed reluctance to get directly involved in the emotional training of students because they do not feel equipped to do so, and because they feel their own emotional needs have to be taken into account as well (Nellum-Williams; Weare & Gray, 2003). Hence, it could be helpful for teachers to receive emotional training and support (Jennings et al.; Nellum-Williams; Weare & Gray). This approach is being tested in several pilot studies where teachers participate in professional development programs aimed at promoting their mental health and well-being (Jennings et al.). The hope is that programs that support the socioemotional competence of teachers will in turn allow teachers to better assist their students with emotion regulation.

Currently, there is no emotion curriculum for Suzuki teachers, but it could certainly be incorporated into teacher training. As outlined by the Suzuki Association of the Americas (2003), the existing Teacher Development Program mainly attends to instrument-specific pedagogy, and any mention of social or emotional factors is left to the discretion of individual Suzuki teacher-trainers. If the Teacher Development Program were to be modified to address the socioemotional competence of teachers, such a change might very well impact the emotion regulation of Suzuki students—a possibility that would be a fascinating topic for future study.

Creativity, Emotion Expression, and Emotion Regulation

Opportunities for creative activities such as storytelling (Syed, 2012) and play (Gaensbauer & Siegel, 1995) can have a therapeutic effect on emotion regulation. Consistent with this finding, Hoffmann and Russ (2011) ascertained that emotion regulation and creativity are related. Children in kindergarten through 4th grade who

exhibited more imagination and affect during pretend play were found to be better divergent thinkers and were better able to regulate their emotions. One possible explanation is that creative children might be able to think of more responses, behaviors, and activities to use when attempting to handle arousing emotional events. Similarly, the children who used more direct affect expressions (or emotion words) during a storytelling process were rated as having better emotion regulation. This finding suggests that perhaps some types of emotional expression are also related to emotion regulation.

In an article seeking to define emotion regulation, Thompson (1994) made a case for including emotion expression in the definition of the construct. As children accumulate more ways to appropriately express their emotions, whether verbally or behaviorally, they acquire more alternatives for regulation. By implication, this means that children with better emotion regulation are likely to be those with greater expressive repertoires.

Testing this theory, Liebermann, Giesbrecht, and Müller (2007) studied verbal ability and emotion regulation in preschool children by administering tasks such as the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and a standard disappointment procedure designed to measure emotional control. Their findings showed that verbal ability was significantly related to emotion regulation. The results reinforce Kopp's (1989) suggestion that language offers children a way to regulate their emotions. Echoing this sentiment, Gottman (1986) observed that the expressive language children used to communicate during play facilitated their regulation of emotions.

Building on these findings, Suzuki teachers could promote emotion regulation in Suzuki students by stressing creativity and emotional expression. Specifically, they could underscore the importance of playing music in an expressive manner. Musical expression

is, after all, essentially the communication of feelings through music (Werner, 1996). Some Suzuki teachers—a distressingly small minority—believe that musical expression should be the main musical teaching goal of Suzuki educators (Cole, 2010). Suzuki teachers might be more motivated to emphasize musical expressiveness if they understood that giving their students another outlet for emotion expression nurtures emotion regulation and all its accompanying contributions toward overall wellbeing.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Many conditions contribute to the development of emotion regulation, a competency that has enormous impact on the emotional health and happiness of a child. I have focused on research concerning two broad areas of a child's life—social context and early education—that mirror aspects of the Suzuki approach to music education. Not only does a Suzuki education exploit these known conditions for fostering emotion regulation, but the skills involved in emotion regulation also correspond quite closely to the socioemotional strengths honed in Suzuki lessons, including the abilities to shift and focus attention, problem-solve, and delay gratification. In light of this evidence, I believe that Suzuki education is primed to support a child's development of emotion regulation with few modifications to teaching practices and with no sacrifice of musical integrity.

Dr. Suzuki's primary motivation as a music educator was always to support the character development of children. Accordingly, my hope is that this examination of Suzuki's connection to one key emotional competency might spur renewed interest within the Suzuki community to emphasize extramusical goals. Presently, there are 6,255 teachers registered with the Suzuki Association of the Americas, which is only one of five regions that comprise the International Suzuki Association (<http://suzukiassociation.org>).

Each teacher potentially educates hundreds of students over the course of his or her career. Many thousands of children could benefit if the Suzuki community as a whole invested in nurturing emotion regulation.

I have several concrete recommendations for how Suzuki teachers can foster emotion regulation. First, I suggest that teachers incorporate a parent-training component into their studios that focuses on children's social and emotional learning as it relates to Suzuki education, including the development of emotion regulation. In my studio, first-year parents are required to attend monthly parent education sessions called Parent Effectiveness Training (P. E. T.). The course addresses the importance of parental modeling and is designed to teach communication skills to parents in order to enhance the quality of their relationships with their children (Gordon, 2000). These skills are directly applicable to the inevitable challenges of a Suzuki education, but the parents in my studio have also reported successes using the P.E.T. skills more broadly in their families.

In addition, I encourage Suzuki teachers to hold at least three group classes per month so there is sufficient opportunity for students to reap the benefits of peer interactions. Teachers should establish practices that recognize the equal importance of group and individual lessons; they should teach new skills at group classes, assign homework, and hold parents to the same attendance standards as for individual lessons.

Finally, I recommend that teachers make use of activities specifically aimed at addressing issues of emotion regulation when they arise. For example, if a student is experiencing a strong emotion that is interfering with his ability to take a violin lesson, offer him a chance to set that feeling aside for the remainder of the lesson and retrieve it at the end (if he so chooses). I will sometimes have the student make a drawing or select an

object that represents the feeling so there is something tangible to set aside. Since the interval just before a performance is typically fraught with unsettling emotions, I have found visualizations, affirmations and deep breathing to be effective ways to regulate pre-performance anxiety.

I suspect that Suzuki teachers will recognize through these examples ways in which they already practice emotion regulation with their students. With further understanding of the construct of emotion regulation, I have little doubt that teachers' creativity will fill in the details of implementation. To be clear, I am not suggesting that emotion regulation be prioritized at the cost of musical development. Instead, I believe that emotion regulation and musical development complement one another, especially in a Suzuki environment.

Considering the existing correspondences between Suzuki education and emotion regulation leads me to wonder: Do Suzuki students already exhibit better emotion regulation than non-Suzuki music students? There has been scant research on this subject, but I am encouraged that the topic is starting to capture the attention of researchers. For example, a recent experimental study indicated that infants receiving an early childhood version of Suzuki instruction were better able to handle frustration and were more capable of being soothed by caregivers in comparison to a group of infants receiving non-Suzuki music training (Gerry, Unrau, & Trainor, 2012). This study offers some of the most direct evidence to date linking Suzuki to emotion regulation, and the findings also reinforce the importance of early education.

Another potential research direction would be to explore which activities in instrumental lessons have the greatest impact on children's emotion regulation. Expanding the line of inquiry, it would also be worth examining how Suzuki education corresponds to

other socioemotional constructs, such as emotion knowledge. The link between Suzuki education and emotion regulation is, after all, just one thread in the complex tapestry that weaves together music lessons and life skills. Dr. Suzuki left this project unfinished when he died at the age of 99, but his vision promises to inspire teachers for generations to come.

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