

Be prepared!

Training and exams for Suzuki teaching

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I was delighted when I saw the splendid and comprehensive syllabus for each of the five levels of training which the ESA produced in 2013*. It is highly detailed, covering a multitude of aspects of Suzuki philosophy, specifying, for instance, minimum numbers of hours of observation and supervised teaching, and totally relevant to everyone who wishes to teach according to the Suzuki approach.

Trainees start Suzuki courses with varying degrees of performing ability, teaching experience, and knowledge of Suzuki philosophy. Some trainees have more time to study than others; some learn faster than others. So there can be no “one size fits all” policy – every trainee progresses differently through the training course.

Obviously teacher trainers need to plan their courses to cover not only all the teaching points on all pieces in each level, and ensure trainees can play each piece well, but also cover all the Suzuki philosophy specified by the ESA syllabus for the level. In addition, I believe training should cover broader aspects of teaching, such as how to introduce sight-reading and scales in a Suzuki way. As well as keeping up with current research on how children learn!

I'd be the first to say that it's extremely difficult to cover all that is required for each level in 100 hours (120 hours for level 1). And indeed, my own Cambridge Suzuki Training course is open-ended – trainees don't start at the beginning of a year and expect to take an exam after 10 or 12 months. Many trainees take at least 18 months, if not two or three years, working towards their next exam. But there is also flexibility – those who are already fine musicians, learn quickly, are able to devote much time to study, and are also gaining experience through plenty of teaching, are able to move on fast and take two levels together perhaps 18 months after their previous exam.

Although it is a challenge to offer sessions on every single topic included in the syllabus, effort should be made to cover as much of the syllabus as possible during the course. For each level, the syllabus specifies a certain amount of written work, on topics such as effective practise and child development. Additionally, I ask trainees to prepare a brief list of ideas on each of the other subjects mentioned in the syllabus, such as different learning styles and the ongoing role of the parent. I expect them to produce this written work incorporating material from course presentations and discussions, books I suggest they read, their own private studies, and their experiences of teaching and working with children. The more they know about Suzuki philosophy, and the more thoroughly they understand it and can articulate it in their written work, the better teachers they will become.

Examinees should be ready for questions on any subject related to Suzuki philosophy, from simple questions on their own teaching practice to obscure questions not directly on the syllabus. However, generally, they should expect questions on topics specified in the syllabus for their level.

Quality of written work is another issue. Some trainees may not have written an essay for decades prior to starting their Suzuki training; others may have recently completed masters or doctoral theses. Some are writing in their own language (their mother tongue!) and others may be writing in a language in which they are not completely fluent. Length of essay is not important; nor, particularly, is elegant use of language. More vital is that the ideas are there, written however briefly, even as bullet points. It is to be hoped the home tutor will have seen all the examinees' written work at least two months in advance of the exam (as specified in the ESA syllabus) in order to evaluate it and give feedback that can be incorporated before the written assignments are shown to the two external examiners.

Regarding performance levels, again, some trainees are fine musicians who perform regularly, while others can play their instruments reasonably well and particularly love teaching children. The ability to inspire children to reach their full potential is more important than being able to perform like a professional. Incorporating Suzuki teaching skills, such as encouraging listening to tone quality, working on one point in a piece, and knowing how to involve the parent, are crucial.

The examiners hope the candidate will continue to study Suzuki philosophy and, ideally, continue training. They must feel confident that the trainee understands the huge responsibility of being a Suzuki teacher – motivating young children to become not only accomplished instrumentalists and expert musicians but also, through their focus and perseverance, to become people of fine character whose study skills will transfer to other areas of their lives.

Look on www.jennymacmillan.co.uk for other articles by Jenny, such as:

- *Inspiring and effective lessons*
- *The importance of Twinkle variations*
- *A creative approach to sight-reading*

as well as several articles on practising.

* ESA syllabus: www.europeansuzuki.org/assets/Uploads/TT-Manual-2018-Syllabus2.pdf