

# RAISE YOUR ABILITY WITH A PIECE YOU CAN PLAY

By Shinichi Suzuki

Not only in music but in every area, the success or failure of education depends on whether or not you carry out the "principle of fostering ability." Therefore, those who do not know how to foster ability will be unable to raise children beautifully. And those who, not knowing how to foster ability, overlook the flaw in the traditional idea of ability as something "inborn," never fail to ask, "Does every child grow in the same way?" If they understand the "law of ability," such a strange question can never surface.

Babies in the stone age, without exception, all grew to have the heart, sensitivity, and ability of the stone age, despite differences in the environment of their growth. Whether in the heart, sensitivity, or ability, no one's upbringing will be totally identical with another's. Anyway, above all I would like you to know the "law of ability." How ability can be acquired and fostered, and how it can fail to form, is the first principle one needs to know of education.

Ability is a question of the physiology of the big brain. The right hand of a right-handed person has acquired far greater sensitivity, power, and other abilities than the left hand. These abilities developed in the right hand in the course of repeated training in what it can do. Let us clearly understand that repeated practice of what one is capable of doing is the principle of fostering outstanding ability. Take calligraphy for example. If you have written a character five times, can you say you are through with that character because you can already write it? In order to refine your hand, you must compare what you have written with the model from which you copied and write it many more times. Thus, the ability to write well gradually grows. I think you can understand the method of fostering fine ability from this example.

After a student has learned to play a piece, I tell him during the lesson, "Now that your preparation is complete, let's practice in order to build your ability. The lesson is just beginning."

I let him practice by comparing his performance with the record, or by playing along with the recording. This serves to gradually foster musical rhythm, refined tonality, and beautiful posture. This is the crux of my approach to fostering fine students. Only after the student has learned the piece can the teacher begin to demonstrate his skill of fostering ability. Yet, some mothers who do not understand this key point of Suzuki education think that "going to the next piece means becoming more advanced." All they want is to advance to a higher piece. Aiming at fostering fine ability, the teacher may try to zealously instruct according to the principle of "creating ability with a familiar piece the student can already play," but some mothers seem unhappy that he "just won't let us go forward."

Create fine ability with an old piece—if this method is carried out correctly, every child will grow splendidly. I would very much like the mothers of Talent Education members to understand this. It is like learning the mother tongue. A small child repeats what words he can say every day. He may seem slow at first, but he quickly increases his vocabulary by the time he is five or six and starts to jabber loquaciously. In the same way, while diligently working to enrich his ability using old pieces, a student will soon begin to display fine ability to go speedily ahead. The Suzuki method is the mother tongue method. We are practicing the same method as education in the mother tongue, which never fails any child.

Let your children listen frequently to the records, and work on creating inner ability at home. If a child does not listen to spoken language, he will be a miserable speaker. "Listen and practice, listen and practice"—this is the same thing as "look and practice, look and practice" in calligraphy. In any case, think this over for your child, so that fine ability will grow. In other words, Talent Education is a method for fostering fine children. Therefore, I ask you to study this eagerly. —Suzuki, Shin'ichi, *Where Love is Deep*, pp. 51-52.