

Tom Brown – Teacher Action Research Project 1

Running Head: TOM BROWN – TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

What are the effects of using the Suzuki “mother tongue” approach on learning achievement in seventh grade geography?

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Table of Contents

Abstract

Introduction

Adjustment of the Mother Tongue Approach

Review of the Literature

Repetition within the Suzuki Classroom, Imitation

Methods and Procedures

Procedures

Date Collection

Results

Conclusion

Abstract

The Talent Education Approach or as it is sometimes called, the Suzuki Method, always has impressed me in a deep way. The Suzuki Approach to educating students and parents is much more than just something used to educate music students. The approach may have positive implications in other fields of study. The learning potential of all children is truly amazing when placed in the correct environment. I wish to create a Suzuki environment in my geography classroom so that my 7th grade students have a chance to reach their learning potentials and become better human beings because of this experience. This research will be the first step for me to learn more about the Suzuki Method and its place in other educational realms. The methods used for this study will include observation of my students, ANOVA test, surveys and other writings related to the Suzuki Approach. A pre-test and a post-test will be used to measure student achievement. Throughout the implementation of this method, data will be collected in the form of field notes, homework assignments and test grades.

What are the effects of using the Suzuki “mother tongue” approach on learning achievement in seventh grade geography?

Introduction

I'm truly amazed with the learning potential of all children. The Talent Education Approach or as it is sometimes called, the Suzuki Method, always has impressed me in a deep way. The Suzuki approach to educating students and parents is much more than just something used to educate music students. The methodology and philosophical implications of Dr. Suzuki's Talent Education movement will continue to have a far reaching appeal in the realm of educational philosophies. The approach is starting to and will continue to have implications in other fields of study. According to the author of *Frames of Mind* (1983) and *Multiple Intelligences* (1993) Howard Gardener states that the Suzuki Method works because the Japanese master Shinichi Suzuki identified the factors to teaching young children and Suzuki also realized that children have an enormous capacity to learn their mother tongue and additional information when it is presented in the proper environment and in the proper fashion (Gardner, 1983).

I included certain key elements of the Suzuki philosophy and methodology in my classroom and observed and quantified the impact the philosophy had on my students, the parents and my own teaching. I created a Suzuki environment within my classroom so that my students could reach their learning potential. Students were engaged in the learning process through games, use of repetition and review of material.

Parents were involved in the research and asked to volunteer in the process of teaching and working with their child throughout the research. I sent out an informational letter describing the Suzuki Approach of learning to the parents.

What is the Suzuki Method?

According to Dr. Suzuki and his writings, (Suzuki, 1967) talent is no accident of birth. Dr. Suzuki believed that people are born with a natural ability to learn information and to build their skills to a high level. In addition, our environment shapes who we are and can stunt or promote our mental development.

Many students are labeled from an early age as having a learning disability, when in reality it was poor parenting skills or a poor school environment which created the supposed disability (Suzuki, 1966). I, as well as Dr. Suzuki and the teachers and parents who teach within his philosophy, believe that every child can learn under the proper environmental conditions, given the proper instruction and most importantly the time required to achieve.

The mother tongue approach was a phrase coined by Dr. Suzuki to describe the heart of his method of learning. In the book, *The Magic of Matsumoto: The Suzuki Method of Education* written by Dr. Carolyn M. Barrett (1995), the mother tongue approach to learning is described in five main points. I wish to describe each point that I incorporated into my 7th grade geography classroom:

1. The environmental conditions and their influences on the new-born baby as it becomes accustomed to the sounds of the mother tongue.
2. Teaching the child by constant repetition to utter its first sound. Usually “Mama, Mama” and so on.
3. Everyday attitude of the parents after the baby starts to talk.
4. Natural progress through daily practice.
5. The skillfulness with which the parents build up enthusiasm in the child and the happiness the child finds in acquiring its newfound ability (Barrett, 1995).

Adjustments of the Mother Tongue Method

The mother tongue approach has been used over and over again for many years and is a wonderful method of education. In fact, the best method of learning can be found within the mother tongue approach because the success rate is 100% (Suzuki, 1967). The method was first used to teach the violin to young children; however, the method is being adapted and used in many other fields of musical and non-musical subject areas. The fact that the method has been used to teach thousands of children to learn violin and other instruments to a high level over the past 5 decades is proof that it works and works very

well (Suzuki, 1967). One of Dr. Suzuki's passions was to have his method incorporated into the public school setting. In fact, he started a Suzuki elementary school in Matsumoto, Japan which is in operation today. Of course, the method must be altered and made to fit into other subjects for the appropriate age levels, but the underlying foundation of the method is sound, natural and shows far superior academic and attitudinal results when compared to traditional education approaches (Barrett, 1995).

Since I'm walking in somewhat new territory, the heart of my research is based on the writings of Dr. Suzuki (1966,1967), Susan Grilli (1995), John Kendall (1967,1996), Paula Resch (1984) and Dr. Carolyn M. Barrett (1995). In addition, I faced many limitations such as time, age appropriate students, and assigning grades to students. The Suzuki Approach normally allows for longer periods of time for mastery of material. I was limited with my time and I only had three weeks to conduct my research. Furthermore, traditional Suzuki education begins when students are between 3-5 years of age.

Review of Literature

The first point of the mother tongue approach states that children are products of his/her own environment (Suzuki, 1966). The classroom should have an environment in which every child believes that he/she can and will be successful. The connection between Talent Education and my classroom is that every child can learn geography and gain a high level of proficiency within the discipline when the proper environment is created. The aspect of creating a social learning environment is no new concept when it comes to education theories. The U.S.S.R born social theorist, Lev Vygotsky came up with a similar concept for social learning. Vygotsky stated that learning happens inside a zone when social interaction is taking place. The phenomenon which Vygotsky identified is called the Zone of Proximal Development, or ZPD. According to the Social Development Theory, special learning takes place under the guidance of an adult (teacher) or when other children (peers) are bridging the gap (ZPD) between the known and the unknown. This is when learning takes place according to Vygotsky (Riddle, E. 1999).

In addition to Vygotsky's ZPD theory, Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory also supports the

idea that the environment plays a critical role in learning. The Social Learning Theory suggests that people learn a variety of behaviors through a process called behavior modeling. Most behaviors are learned from within the environment. The best time to model and reinforce good behavior is when a child is in the formative years (Isom, M. 1998). When I mention the Suzuki environment, I'm referring to an environment in which positive learning behaviors are modeled for the students and an environment in which the students fill comfortable learning from the teacher and from each other as a group.

The type of teaching that I will use in my Talent Education environment is Student-centered Teaching. The concept was first introduced by Carl Rogers. He said that the teacher should treat the student as an equal in the process of learning (Barrett, 1995). This way the student is truly treated as an equal and has the ability to explore and learn on their own without fear of teacher domination. Dr. Suzuki states in his book, *Nurtured by Love*, the teacher should be in awe of the child and learn from the child (Suzuki, 1966).

According to Dr. Suzuki, the child that can speak his native tongue correctly but cannot do math correctly doesn't have low intelligence nor is below average; the problem for this child stems from the poor educational system in which the child was taught and labeled. The child's ability has not been developed properly and that is the reason for so many poor skills within the public school systems (Suzuki, 1966). I think that regardless of innate abilities, all children can reach a high degree of development in any subject area as long as the following elements are present:

1. Begin as young as possible.
2. Create the best possible environment.
3. Use the finest teaching methods.
4. Provide a great deal of training and repetition.
5. Use the finest teachers available (Suzuki, 1967).

How will this be achieved? According to Paula Resch (1984), positive reinforcement is an important

concept of the Suzuki Method that she uses in her classroom the first day of school. Like Professor Resch, I concur the best way to achieve positive reinforcement with students is to tell them the first day of school that you believe that everyone will be successful in class if they work hard, turn in their work on time and are willing to learn together with their teacher, peers and their parents. It is reassuring to a child to know they will not fail a class if they do the best work they can do; the child should be willing to re-work and improve on a lesson in order to achieve their best work. According to Dr. Suzuki (1967), everyone has a sprout of talent which can be developed and cultivated over time. The Harvard Professor of Cognition and Education, Howard Gardner, has coined a term that is often used by educators to help describe what Dr. Suzuki instinctively understood about children's ability to learn, Gardner calls it Multiple Intelligences (Gardner, 1983).

One must learn more than bits and pieces of information, they also must be able to recall what they have learned the day before and use it days and months later. In other words, ability breeds ability and will motivate a child to learn (Suzuki, 1967). When teachers approach their work this way the child is rewarded for trying and not for the quality of work compared to a grading system and other students. The child is competing against no-one except himself. According to Alfie Kohn, too much focus in the schools is placed on homework and an overused and abusive grading system. Kohn subscribes to encouraging true learning and thinking without students trying to perform for a letter grade or perform homework without gaining any real benefit. In fact, most students gain a negative image towards school when too much homework is assigned (Kohn, A. 2006). This is the environment that I hope to incorporate in to my classroom so that a child can succeed without being at odds with the teacher or classmates.

Repetition within the Suzuki Classroom, Imitation

In the highly successful Japanese education system the value of mastery of material is valued by all within the culture. The mastery of the basics is the motto for all educators, factory workers and supervisors throughout Japan (Rohlen & LeTendre, 1998). Teaching facts to students is looked down upon

by some educators in the teaching profession today. Mastery Learning is learning to a point of almost perfection (Barret, 1995). I believe it is the foundation of success for students. We should learn and be able to recall basic facts in order for our ability to develop to the next level of higher thinking and be able to maintain our cultural and historical memories when we communicate with one another. The concept of building from previous knowledge is used by many educators and is spelled out in detail in Bloom's Taxonomy. It is when students learn and process information at different stages throughout the learning process or throughout the cognitive domain (Filders & Thornton, 1997).

The repetition of information is at the heart of the mother tongue approach of education. A child would never learn to speak without hearing and repeating words spoken within his/her environment. The same holds true for learning any subject. The use of repetition will not only be used with the use of manipulative games but will also be used in the sequencing of the curriculum. The curriculum will be structured in such a way that the students will master a basic skill and in time use that same skill in a different context of geography. In addition to repetition being used in my classroom, the use of positive reinforcement will also be included.

According to Dr. Suzuki (1967), ability requires repetition and patience. The most famous quote from Dr. Suzuki is as follows: "Ability equals knowledge plus 10,000 times." What I take from this and hope to imbed into my Suzuki classroom is the understanding that students can develop abilities and skills given enough time, proper instruction and patience from the parent and from the teacher. Repetition is at the heart of learning. Students need to understand this point and see the importance of repetition and how it correlates with success in the classroom and in everyday life.

Repetition also must be done in a thoughtful fashion to achieve good results, because bad or unthoughtful repetition can create poor results. It is not good enough just to do your daily lessons; students must do their lessons with thought and care to achieve meaningful results.

The final and last point of Talent Education is for parents to build enthusiasm in their child's ability.

In the Suzuki Method parents attend concerts, group lessons and arrange for their child to have a chance to share skills and abilities which they have acquired through practice (Grilli, 1987.) This is another part of operant conditioning at work in Talent Education. Operant Conditioning is a type of learning that promotes learning through the use of reinforcement (Barrett, 1995). Much of operant conditioning and the reinforcement stems from the child's success through repetition. Operant Condition was used by Dr. Suzuki and made famous by B.F.Skinner in the United States.

In a research study conducted for the Carnegie Corporation, Keniston (1977) stated that schools have taken away the role of parents at the schools. In addition, the study calls for more involvement of parents in their children's learning (Grilli, 1987). One way that I have increased more parent involvement and more student interest in learning is by performing a Greek play. Throughout rehearsing the play the students and the parents become most excited about social studies. Why? I think it is because they are immersed in the material being taught, in this case learning their lines, building a piece of staging, coming up with costumes and finally preparing to perform the play for other classmates and their parents. This type of environment is a social environment in which according to John Dewey, Vygotsky and Bandura, learning takes place. After about one month of working on the play, the class performed the play for parents and friends after school for an evening performance. I think this is the best way for students to learn, when everyone is involved and immersed for a purpose and with a community atmosphere.

Methods and Procedures

- The following six elements will help students learn and improve upon the learning taking place in the classroom. They are as follows: exposure, imitation, encouragement, repetition, addition and refinement (Grilli, 1987). These concepts will be the main elements of the methodology used within my classroom along with the other points of the mother tongue approach of learning my research.

- Dr. Suzuki stated that practice makes perfect (Suzuki, 1966). It is not good enough to learn the geography of your world and then soon forget about where things and places are located days later. One must be able to recall information about geography many months down the road. As an educational guide, I must facilitate a way for students to achieve this sort of memory for geography. In order to build this ability in social studies, geography, science, math or music one must practice in an active and positive way. In my experience, most students dislike homework because they see no value or importance in doing it. I created an open and safe learning environment where all the homework assignments were completed in class and used as a spring board for classroom debate and group discussion time. As the teacher, I moved around the room and helped students with their class work. In this type of environment students became responsive to learning and completed their homework and became more willing to take part in the talk or discussion of the day. Recent research by Alfie Kohn also suggests that too much homework can be a burden to the student and to the families. In addition, the research suggests that hours of homework do not improve student performance (Kohn, A. 2006).
- In addition to using in class homework to refine and hone learning skills in my classroom, I strived to make the subject matter meaningful to the students. Dr. Suzuki, Maria Montessori and I am sure others believe that all concepts of learning should be made meaningful for the students. It also is important not to over teach and instruct inside a given subject matter to students. Doing so kills the student's interest in the subject (Grilli, 1987). I strongly avoided over instruction to the students. According to John Dewey, the father of the progressive movement in education, stated that when teachers over teach and focus more on instruction and forget about a student's natural curiosity towards

learning, the subject matter becomes inert (Filderts & Thorntom, 1997). I incorporated service and group projects that were meaningful and relevant to my classroom, this kept the subject matter from becoming inert.

- Another assignment that is in the Suzuki style and spirit would be for a teacher to have a geography fair. This would be a night in which students share a project that they have been working on during the school year. I also would have group projects in which parents and children work together to achieve a common goal.
- One way I included repetition in my classroom is through the use of games. It is known that children learn best through games and fun play. I used technology, puzzles, group or team learning, art and other fun ways for my students to learn the subject matter. I used a simple geography map game to teach students certain countries of the world. The students simply numbered the countries on a map from 1-12 and then students teamed up with a partner and one student rolled the dice and had to name the country correctly as the other partner made sure the answer was correct. After a few minutes of playing this game, the students knew the material and enjoyed learning their geography. The games served the purpose of, as Dr. Suzuki calls it, brain training (Barrett, 1995).
- In addition to games, I emphasized the importance of rewriting an assignment, proof reading a paper and looking up incorrect answers on a test or a homework assignment. This type of reinforcement will send a message so that students understand that what they do in the classroom is important and is something that needs to be learned and remembered in everyday life.

Procedures

The main purpose of the research is to implement the six elements of the Suzuki Approach into my

seventh grade geography classroom. A detailed observation and analysis of the mother tongue approach's impact will be recorded for further study and publication. The following questions guided the research:

1. *What is the best way to implement the mother tongue approach into a seventh grade geography classroom?* I implemented the Suzuki Approach to my classroom by telling the students in the treatment group what I was doing and explained to them the Suzuki Approach and how I was going to use it in the teaching of the classroom. The students really gained a sense of excitement and enjoyed being involved in this special research.
2. *How will the Suzuki mother tongue impact in a public school classroom setting?* I believe the biggest impact of the Suzuki Approach in a public school setting was that the students really thought that they were involved in something special and took a strong interest in what I was teaching and how the approach made them apart of the learning process. Instead of isolating students the approach involved and immersed them in the learning.
3. *How do students, parents and the teacher work together to accomplish student learning in a positive atmosphere?* I sent home emails and letters keeping the parents informed about what was going on in the classroom and ways in which they can help their child be successful in geography. The students had to return these papers with a parent's signature. A steady stream of communication always flowed within my classroom from the teacher to the child and to the parent.

In addition, once a week the students had to have their portfolio folders signed by the same parent. This encouraged the parent(s) and the student(s) to communicate with one another in a positive manner about school.

4. *How do the students and parents respond to this new method of learning?* I did not collect any information about how the parents and student responded to this method of learning. However, throughout the three weeks in which I carried out the research many of the students

had positive comments about the Suzuki Approach, many of the comments focused on how their grades improved.

5. *What impact has the Suzuki Method had on my own teaching?* I became very aware of the importance of repetition in the classroom. I normally taught a lesson or concept and never spent time on the concept after it was taught. It is extremely important to work repetition into the daily routine in order for the students to internalize concepts. In addition, the importance of making a connection between concepts being taught and what the students already know.

Data Collection

The methods of data collection used for this study included observation of my students, field notes, as well as pre and post-test. In both ANOVA procedures, a pre-test and a post-test were used as a covariate to control residual variation of the control group and the Suzuki treatment group. The ANOVA test was used to measure the factors that influenced student achievement.

The Suzuki Method was implemented into my seventh grade geography classrooms. Random selection was used to choose the subjects of the treatment and of the control group. The subjects in this study were from a mid-western rural school setting. The school was a Jr. High School with about 200 students.

Throughout the implementation of this method, data was collected in the form of field notes, and traditional multiple choice tests. The students were given a pre-test over a chapter chosen at random and then given a traditional multiple choice test over that chapter. The Suzuki treatment group was taught with the Suzuki Approach and the control group was taught in the traditional manner of teaching with lecture, notes, and little interaction and discussion between teacher and student. After the chapter was completely taught the two groups then took the same test as the pre-test, this was the post-test.

Results

In test round 1, the ANOVA results indicated a significant difference between the results of the

control group and the results of the students taught using the Suzuki Approach. Partial Eta squared = .299 indicated that 29.9% of the difference in variance results from the difference in the treatment. The following charts helps to explain the difference between control and treatment groups in the study. A second trial demonstrated significant results as follows: $F=3.082$ with a Partial Eta Squared = .075 at Alpha = .05. In this second trial, 7.5% of the difference in variance between the two sample groups can be attributed to the differing instructional method.

The following table includes the descriptive statistics of my students for post-test number 1. Group number 1 is the control group and group number 2 is the treatment or Suzuki group throughout the study.

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Post-Test 1

Treatment Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1.00	26.8261	2.88652	23
2.00	27.3333	1.71499	18
Total	27.0488	2.42849	41

Dependent Variable: Post-Test 1 (Tests of Between-Subjects Effects)

Source	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2	36.219	8.420	.001	.307
Intercept	1	656.163	152.536	.000	.801
Pretest 1	1	69.841	16.236	.000	.299

In test round 3, the second trail described above, ANOVA results indicated a significant difference between the results of the control group and the results of the students taught using the Suzuki Approach similar to test round 1. The difference in variance between the two sample groups can be attributed to the different instructional method that was implemented in the treatment. The following tables provide the

statistical data demonstrating the difference between the two groups.

Descriptive Statistics

Dependent Variable: Post-Test 3

Treatment Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1.00	26.8182	3.67276	22
2.00	25.7895	2.57291	19
Total	26.3415	3.21411	41

Dependent Variable: Post-Test 3 (Test of Between-Subjects Effects)

Source	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2	20.491	2.092	.137	.099
Intercept	1	524.085	53.501	.000	.585
Pretest 3	1	30.192	3.082	.087	.075

In post-test 3, 8.7% of the difference in variance between the two sample groups can be attributed to the differing instructional method used during this study. In addition, $F=3.082$ with a Partial Eta Squared = .075 at Alpha = .05.

Conclusion

An article written by Dr. Reuben Feuerstein (1981) states that teachers and parents are not only givers of knowledge to children but rather a mediator of learning. Furthermore, Dr. Feuerstein says that intelligence and learning can be taught and that intelligence is not unchangeable (Grilli, 1987). This is the same belief that I also share about learning and through implementation the universal concept of the Suzuki Approach I hope to achieve an increase in student and parent interest in learning and an increase of sensitivity within the classroom among students.

Furthermore, I firmly believe that if given more time to continue this study, I would again see even more positive results in student and parent interest in learning.

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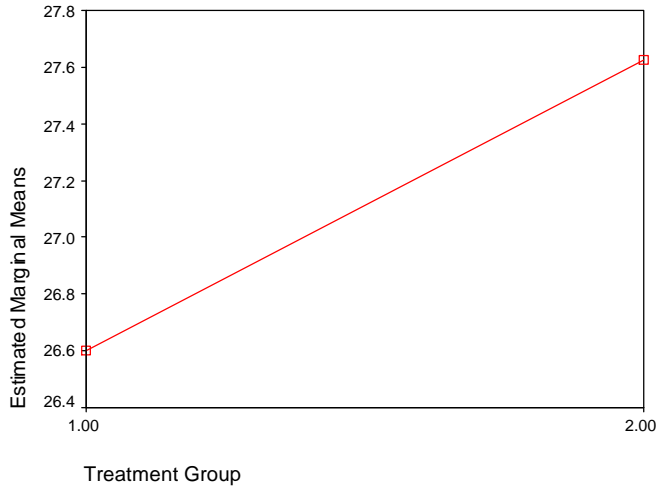
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Appendixes

Estimated Marginal Means of Post-Test 1



Estimated Marginal Means of Post-Test 3

