Ability Development and Beyond
Facilitation, Inspiration and Innovation

My goal today is to inspire you to facilitate the art of inspiration in your students, to show you the innovative path to divergent teaching in a Suzuki environment.
To Begin, close your eyes and think for a moment about your best experiences as a musician.

For me, it was a recent performance of the Shostakovich String Quartet #8 with my colleagues. We all felt that we didn't have enough rehearsal time going in, but our desire to share this phenomenal powerhouse of a piece with our audience propelled us beyond our expectations. The performance was an intense shared emotional connection with the music, our audience, and each other. I had a similar experience in college: I worked on a Hindemith Sonata with a terrific pianist. We performed it in recital and for my jury. A few days later we were hanging out near the practice rooms and I suggested we play the piece for fun. At first, he thought I was a little crazy, but he eventually got into the spirit and agreed to do it. In that practice room we communicated on a level we never had before and played better than we ever had before. We left feeling exhilarated by the totally inspired performance we had shared with each other.

And just a few weeks ago I was playing at my music school's Halloween Party, and experienced the same kind of feeling. At the party everyone dresses up and the faculty takes turns performing on stage while families eat and enjoy seeing each other. I sight read Cole Porter arrangements and the Mozart Hunt String Quartet while a little girl dressed as a strawberry danced near my feet. The music flowed from my fingers to my fellow musicians and under the feet of the dancing strawberry. At the end of the party, I improvised with a group of my older students. We never even noticed the crowd had all left.

These experiences can all be described as inspired: It's that heightened level of performance and communication that takes us beyond ourselves while at the same time empowers us in a way nothing else can.

Now… think about your best experiences as a teacher. I bet they're moments when you see your students reach that same heightened level of performance that we all recognize as inspired; whether it's in a lesson, a class or a performance.

Here are some of my favorites:

- Watching a student with terrible stage fright overcome it and perform with powerful magical musicality
- Watching my 5' almost 1" daughter perform the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto with commanding presence at a National SAA Conference (in bare feet)

- Watching 5 year old Ben improvise beautifully with a huge smile on his face
- Watching a group of teenage students high 5 each other after improvising a string quartet live in recital – because it went better than it ever had before – they were so in sync with each other's ideas.
- It's getting to work with this fabulous group of kids behind me. Every Sunday!
- It's watching as 6 tour group kids in a row win their respective youth orchestra concerto competitions and seeing them perform with poise and deep musicality…

You know…I can't judge competitions – because when I look at students all I see is potential.

I look at students like a sculptor looks at a block of marble.

I envision their perfection of technique and posture, then whittle away until together we achieve that vision.

Next I need to draw out the unique musical soul that innately exists in every child (like the Blue Fairy in Pinocchio who waves her wand and turns a puppet into a real boy).

My goal is to bring out the uniqueness of each child – to bring out <u>their</u> voice, not <u>mine</u>. To teach them to understand the language of music in a way that allows them to speak from their hearts.

This is the magical best experience I want to teach my students.

This experience is what Mihaly CzikszentMihalyi calls <u>Flow</u>.

CzikszentMihalyi, a phenomenologist, went searching for the psychology of happiness. In his research he studied people who did things because they loved to do them: not for money – not for recognition – not for power

He learned that:

…Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue…as the unintended side effect of one' personal dedication to a course greater than oneself.

Victor Frankl, Holocaust Survivor, Psychiatrist

'Man's Search for Meaning'

The book <u>Flow</u> was brought to my attention by a student who recognized a connection between his work and mine.

Flow in the language of my work is called 'Inspiration' – The third and highest point in my theory of the creative process.

30 years ago I went searching, like CzikszentMihalyi, to uncover the mystery of how creativity works in the brain. I studied the writings of creative geniuses throughout history – across multiple fields: mathematicians, scientists, writers, composers, dancers, artists, etc.

The pedagogy I developed based on the creative process theory was inspired by Dr. Suzuki who I studied with in 1984.

The Creative Process Theory

Conscious Work

Conscious work involves many elements: setting up a problem, repetition of work on the problem, understanding the tools necessary to solve the problem, and exploration of different points of view.

Subconscious Work

Subconscious work occurs in a part of the brain which we cannot be consciously aware of. It occurs only after conscious work on a creative problem has been attempted repetitiously. It seems to work best when the conscious part of the brain is at rest or is thinking about a subject other than the creative problem at hand. The exact manner in which the subconscious part of the brain functions is the greatest mystery in the creative process.

Inspiration

Inspiration, the highest point in the creative process, occurs when the subconscious having reached a solution to the creative problem, communicates that solution to the conscious. It is characterized by a quality of sudden illumination of thought. It will occur often without warning as a waking dream, complete or nearly complete in form, structure, length, etc. It always occurs in the form of an answer to the problem – not in a theoretical explanation of how that solution was arrived at.

Theory

Part four in the creative process, is the analysis or theoretical explanation of the inspiration. There is a confusion regarding the correct placement of theory in the creative process because the theories and technical analysis of former inspirations have often been used to begin the creative process on a higher level. Often the theoretical analysis of one

creative genius will be studied and used by another. In science, mathematics, or medicine it is common to share a thesis on a theoretical basis: In music or art, theories are passed along through the aural/visual study of a particular work. In music, after a period of time theories become written down by theorists whose primary function is to analyze the work of former creative geniuses. These theoretical laws in music (i.e. the rules of counterpoint, harmony, etc.) can then be studied and broken in music as they are for example in physics when a new inspiration occurs by the next generation of creative geniuses. Because of the breakdown of a central harmonic language in the 20th century, many composers began writing their own harmonic thesis upon which to base their own music. A similar phenomenon occurred in the visual arts in the 20th century. All this served to further confuse the correct placement of theory in the creative process.

A certain amount of rules are necessary to begin a creative process. All creativity is built on creativity. Each new idea grows out of an old one. However, the inspiration is the one truly new creation of the individual which cannot be explained except through the analysis of his work. Therefore, in the creative process this analysis is actually the only new theoretical work. The theory on which the inspiration had been based, or begun would have been changed, subtly altered or expanded to create a new theory. This new theory could not exist without the inspiration and therefore must follow not precede it.

Further, it is important to recognize that theory is a conscious work process. Theory or analysis is the conscious working out or explanation of a finished or partially finished creative effort which occurred primarily the subconscious. This distinction is crucial to the teaching of the creative process. The inspiration can only occur after or during a conscious brain rest or relaxation period. If this conscious relaxation period is not allowed (due to the over-emphasis on theoretical focus) the creative effort may be stunted and the inspiration may be blocked.

The pedagogy of CAD (Creative Ability Development) can be summed up in a simple formula:

The freedom of choice + Disciplined practice = the development of creative ability!

Improvisation provides the freedom of choice, repetition of improvisation over a given harmony or within a structure provides the disciplined practice

In CAD pedagogy the number one rule is, “There’s No Such Thing as a Mistake”. There are no right or wrong answers – only each child’s search for the best within himself.

It's the most nurturing environment possible. The teacher is never a critic only a facilitator and a catalyst to higher growth.

The 2nd rule in CAD is 'Applause and Silence'. We listen to each child's creative attempt and applaud his efforts. Active listening on the part of the student is his means of gathering information for future creative efforts. Group and private CAD work multiplies the progress just like the Suzuki method.

Phenomenology, CzikszentMihalyi's field, is the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness.

In studying his work, I discovered that his 8 components of true joy are actually the components necessary for creative inspiration. I also realized that I had actually stumbled on the same 8 components in my CAD pedagogy.

In his work, the phenomenology of enjoyment has 8 components. See how they compare to CAD.

1 - Confront tasks we have a chance of completing (the search for our best improvisational solution to a given structure is a reasonable goal).
2 - Be able to concentrate on what we are doing (Suzuki said focus on 1 point at a time – therefore in the creative act the search for a creative solution is the 1 point – there are no interruptions or corrections of any kind)
3 - Have clear goals (solve the musical puzzle)
4 - Have immediate feedback (the student judges his own work)
5 - Deep but effortless involvement that removes awareness, worries, and frustrations of everyday life (There's no such thing as a mistake – so the act of searching is effortless -) students love CAD class – so much so that parents often think then that CAD is just for fun.
6 - Exercise control over one's actions (Daily practice develops ability)
7 - Concern for the self disappears yet paradoxically the sense of self emerges stronger after the flow experience is over. (When students realize the beauty they have created it is empowering)
8 - The sense of the duration of time is altered. (Students practicing CAD increase their practice time effortlessly. Tour Group rehearses 2 hours every Sunday and there are never any complaints)

CzikszentMihalyi also talks about Differentiation and Integration

Differentiation implies a movement toward uniqueness…

Integration refers to its opposite: a union with other people, with ideas and entities beyond the self.

(CAD provides both individual and group work. Students who improvise together effortlessly integrate their unique improvisational 'voice' into the fabric of the ensemble.)

A complex self is one that succeeds in combining these opposite tendencies.

The self becomes complex as a result of experiencing flow.

(In CAD, the student becomes the artist through experiencing inspiration: A musician with a unique expressive voice, with the ability to communicate with his fellow players and his audience.)

We've looked at a philosophical and pedagogical study of inspiration – now let's look at the science of creative development.

What makes new discoveries new is their uniqueness!

But where does that uniqueness come from?

It's simple: We are all born unique ---therefore, we are all born with the innate ability to be creative.

It is the development of the ability to draw on that part of our brains when working on a problem that leads to unique creative solutions.

But what part of the brain precisely handles each person's uniqueness?

It's called the medial prefrontal cortex.

Scientists have known for some time, that when people talk about themselves or describe themselves, the medial prefrontal cortex lights up.

What we didn't know until very recently was that when we improvise the medial prefrontal cortex also lights up. This means that when students improvise they are directly tapping into their own uniqueness in a musical language.

So what happens in the brain if we repeatedly practice structured improvisation?

I had the opportunity to discuss this question with Daniel Coyle author of The Talent Code.

In The Talent Code, Coyle demonstrated how a certain kind of practice could actually trigger the growth of a substance called myelin in our brains. Myelin "is like insulation that wraps around nerve fibers and increases signal strength, speed, and accuracy."

Coyle explained, "Myelin does not respond to fond wishes or vague ideas. It responds to urgent repetition. Struggle is not an option, it is a biological requirement."

I asked Coyle if he thought we could grow creative myelin through the structured repetition of improvisation? His response – absolutely.

In reading his book I was struck by his description of two different 'talent hotbeds' as he called them: Meadowmount and Futsal.

Meadowmount is the very intense music camp where students practice many hours a day. Futsal is a Brazilian form of soccer practice involving the use of an extra heavy ball on an extra small field, forcing players to work intuitively on controlling the ball with great intensity.

It occurred to me that CAD was like Futsal and Meadowmount was like Suzuki. CAD and Futsal are both divergent or creative modes of study, Suzuki and Meadowmount use convergent or analytical modes of study.

Together these two modes of study combine to make one which develops true artistry: Exceptional technique + unique musicality is the definition of artistry.

So how does one facilitate divergence?

First, by letting go of the traditional model of the teacher. In a divergent lesson, the teacher no longer has the right answers, or even the power to correct mistakes. In divergent thinking, *there is no such thing as a mistake!*

Second, the teacher must create the environment for the development of divergent thinking: an environment rich in musical experiences for the student. Also, the environment must be free of the concept of criticism. *Creativity is the art of choice.* Through the removal of criticism in the divergent environment, the student begins to look inward for choices. In his own unique way, he begins the search for the best within himself. Once he finds his truest vision he begins to share; and thus begins a new role for the teacher. The teacher becomes a listener, not to offer criticism, but to fulfill the students' need to communicate.

Third, the teacher must provide a means for discipline in the practice of the creative process. In the divergent realm, discipline refers to the repetitive practicing of the search for a solution to a creative problem.

In essence, the teacher must become a facilitator and a catalyst, but never a critic. He must provide a rich musical environment for the students to experience. He must provide creative musical problems for the students to solve, and encourage their disciplined practice of solving these problems. And finally, he must cultivate his ability to listen without criticism, to hear with his heart, and to recognize and celebrate the emerging creative voice of the child.

Earlier today I asked you to think about your best experiences as a musician and as a teacher. We discovered that those were the moments of selfless passion – for the music – for the art of communication – and for being a witness to the same kind of growth and accomplishment in a child. These are all moments of inspiration.

Inspiration is

- The greatest accomplishment of the human brain
- The source of all the development of mankind – in science, art, literature, music – even humanity.

Inspiration is also something we can teach!

Facilitation is the art of making something easy. As teachers we can facilitate the development of creative ability in our students, and by doing so draw out each child's unique voice.

Robert Frost said "Two roads diverged in a wood and I - I took the one less traveled and that has made all the difference."

Innovation is being willing and able to take the road less traveled to make a difference.

In Nurtured by Love, Suzuki described his meeting with a young man named Kauffman. While staying at Einstein's house, Suzuki witnessed Kauffman improvise on the piano in multiple styles. He wrote "Whether Kauffman's amazing skill at improvising would lead to his becoming a great composer or not is beside the point. I was deeply impressed by his talent, and it struck me that this kind of skill could be developed. What a delight it would be!"

Dr. Suzuki in his great wisdom saw this as a potential area of development over 50 years ago.

When I visited Dr. Suzuki in 1984 and shared my ideas with him, he asked me to continue to study creativity so that someday all children might improvise and write their own music.

I have made it my life's work.

Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity to share my ideas, my discoveries and my dreams. You've been a terrific audience!

Keynote address at the 2014 SAO Conference by Alice Kay Kanack