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“How Firm a Foundation!”
A Standards-based Vision for Beginning String Instruction”

The Midwest Clinic, Chicago, IL
17 December 2002 – 2:45 PM – Williford Room

Session Outline

CONCEPT and PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: Instructing students in fundamental string performance skills while simultaneously developing comprehensive musicianship – all with limited time resources – can be a daunting challenge for even the most experienced string teacher. The National Standards, implemented with creativity and common sense, provide an effective framework toward this end. New and old materials and a variety of creative activities will be presented, discussed, and performed by participants. Bring an instrument and join in.

OBJECTIVE: Attendees will demonstrate familiarity with and awareness of materials and teaching strategies that effectively address instruction of fundamental string techniques as well as the nine Music Content Standards of the National Standards for Arts Education.

I. Introduction

- A. Review of and consensus on the National Standards (nine music content standards)
- B. Brief discussion of how the National Standards are (or may be) reflected in state and local curricula
- C. General matrix/description of beginning string skills
- D. Rubric combining National Standards/string skills matrix

II. Application Activities

- A. Hierarchy of musical skills development based on current research
 - 1. Beat internalization
 - 2. Pitch discrimination
 - 3. Singing
 - 4. Instrumental skills (physical)
 - 5. Note reading
- B. Review of current research on learning activities
- C. Combining common sense and tradition with research
- D. Review of and participant performance of available materials and repertoire that reflect best knowledge and research
 - 1. Criteria for selecting string materials and repertoire that accomplish objective

(continued)

2. Criteria for selecting non-string (general music, vocal, cross-cultural, other arts disciplines, etc.) materials that accomplish objective
3. Multi-media materials and complementary activities that accomplish objective
- E. Organizational issues and strategies for meeting them

III. Assessment and Grading for Motivation

- A. Performance-based assessments
 1. Concerts – performance and informance
 2. Non-traditional authentic demonstrations
- B. Strategies for peer and self-evaluation
- C. Effective grading, recording, and reporting strategies

IV. Closing Activities

- A. Review, including participant involvement for assessment of session objective
- B. Participant evaluation of session
- C. Final questions and answers

***Materials to be drawn from the following:**

1. Original exercises, outlines, handouts, materials
2. String Explorer – Alfred Publishers
3. Fiddlers Philharmonic – Alfred Publishers
4. Fiddlers Philharmonic Encore – Alfred Publishers
5. Suzuki Repertoire and Materials – Summy Burchard
6. Discipline Based Art Education Materials – the Getty Center
7. Selected String Orchestra Repertoire from:
 - a. Highland-Etling
 - b. Boosey and Hawkes
 - c. Other publishers
8. World on a String – Alfred Publishers
9. Various state curricula
10. MENC publications

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Most string teachers philosophically support The National Standards for Arts Education – Music Content Standards – as a framework for comprehensive music instruction. However, constraints of time, space, and resources, exacerbated by the unique performance demands inherent to a school beginning string/orchestra program, often inhibit the teacher to design or implement a comprehensive Standards-based curriculum.

What’s a String Teacher to Do!?!

Contrary to common belief, and perhaps counter-intuitively, a beginning string program that expands the curriculum to regularly includes the National Standards in daily instruction can increase the rate of student learning while providing a broad and thorough music education. Careful selection of instructional materials can provide a departure point and/or enhance a standards-based string curriculum.

Addressing the Standards in the String Class

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music. Regular singing in the string class develops: accurate aural and visual pitch recognition; discrimination of intonation; beat internalization; sight-reading ability.

Teaching Tips: Many method book melodies are common folk songs. Sing at least one song during each session, providing words as necessary (or have students make up their own words). Introduce students to *solfege* early in their training. In each string class, sing at least one method book exercise using *solfege* syllables. The optimum experience is to sing each exercise, using *sofege*, note names, or “moveable *la*,” before playing it, perhaps accompanied by a teacher model or recorded accompaniment.

2. Performing on instruments, alone or with others, a varied repertoire of music.

Performing is obvious – it’s what we do best! Performing a rich and diverse repertoire of music develops: awareness of musical styles; sensitivity to different aesthetics and tastes; personal expression.

Teaching Tips: Choose method books and repertoire representing a broad array of “classical” composers and styles. Invite local composers to write compositions and exercises especially for the students. Introduce students to string folk music from a wide variety of cultures – including music of American sub-cultures and “world” music. Jazz and fiddling styles provide a natural departure point. Be sure to teach the various musical styles in the most authentic context possible.

3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments. Regular experiences with improvisation develop: aural acuity, originality and creativity, personal expression, rhythmic and harmonic “sense,” ability to play in diverse styles, self-confidence.

Teaching Tips: Provide age-appropriate exercises and experiences that will systematically and sequentially provide students with an improvisation “menu.” Choose a method book that includes logically-organized improvisation exercises. Fiddle tunes offer students a concrete vehicle to explore improvisation in a variety of styles. *Fiddlers Philharmonic*, *Fiddlers Philharmonic Encore!*, and *Jazz Philharmonic* (all Alfred publications) are recommended.

4. Composing and arranging music within specific guidelines. Composing and arranging exercises and experience develop: creativity, application of theory skills, musical independence, awareness of musical performance elements, ownership.

Teaching Tips: Students can and should be presented with regular opportunities to compose and arrange music in a developmentally-appropriate manner. Engage students in making simple arranging decisions (such as, “Who will play the top line, who will play the bottom?” and “In what order should we play our exercises today?” or “What should be the order of our concert performance?”), with brief analyses of the musical or aesthetic merits of such decisions. Briefly introduce and/or identify compositional devices in the students’ music (such as variation, inversion, retrograde, contrary motion, etc.). Choose a method book that prepares students with composition techniques aligned with the development of their performance technique.

5. Reading and notating music. Building music-reading skills is usually one of the primary purposes of string instruction, while notation of music often is left behind. The development of music reading and notating skills provides students with the ability to: sight-read music in a variety of styles and forms, experience musical independence, compose music, transcribe music heard aurally, perform in ensembles of various kinds.

Teaching Tips: Select a method book with a carefully constructed sequence of music reading instruction. A “rote-to-note” section at the beginning of the book, consistent with current music learning theory, can lead students to read quickly and efficiently. Commercially- or personally-constructed music theory, composition, and other related exercises, can be provided as homework and “down-time” class work. Involve singing!

6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music. Regular educational experiences in listening, analysis, and description develop: skills in personal reflection, ability to critique intelligently, connoisseurship, awareness of different musical styles, exposure to professional models, “writing across the curriculum.”

Teaching Tips: Choose a method book with an accompanying recording that may be accessed by students at home. Create guided listening assignments with a written reflection response. Provide opportunities for students to hear “real” recordings or concert performances of the arranged exercises in their method books; play these and other recordings as students are entering or leaving the classroom. Ask prompting questions to elicit brief reflective, analytical and descriptive responses from students about their performance of method book exercises and melodies (i.e., “How did the composer organize this piece: who has the melody, harmony, etc.?” or “What mood do you think this music makes the audience feel?”).

7. Evaluating music and music performances. The evaluation and assessment of personal and group performances, and of music performed and heard develops: personal and group standards, ability to offer and express constructive criticism, ability to self-assess, connoisseurship, consumer wisdom, personal expression and a musical vocabulary.

Teaching Tips: Develop a simple framework where objectives can be presented to students that may be used as the basis for self- and peer- assessment. Provide students with an ongoing set of desirable descriptive vocabulary (may be provided by language arts teacher). Help students develop rubrics to use in assessing personal and group progress, with reflections assigned as homework. Make “before and after” videotapes that may be viewed and critiqued at home. Encourage students to register their personal progress on a cumulative progress chart. Encourage students to keep a “listening log” or journal, with regular entries of recorded and live music experiences.

8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts and disciplines outside the arts. When students are presented with opportunities to relate music to other arts areas, as well as to other academic areas, they develop an understanding of: the function of music in society; aesthetic commonalities within the arts; how the arts reflect and can symbolize aspects of other disciplines; how information from other disciplines can increase understanding of music.

Teaching Tips: Develop or choose commercial materials that relate the arts to other arts areas and discipline. Demonstrate to students how certain aesthetic concepts appear in music and art and architecture (display art prints and other objects that are often available for loan from local libraries and art museums). Coordinate instruction with teachers of other disciplines (especially language arts and fine arts) to integrate arts concepts into them. Demonstrate how scientific principles (especially acoustics) and mathematics concepts (particularly concepts of balance) relate to music and string instrument construction. Prepare music that is associated with theater and dance, and coordinate performances with school/local dance classes and drama groups. Perform folk music for the phys-ed “square dance” unit. Have students search Internet sources for related materials.

9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture. Experiences that demonstrate how music and string playing are directly related to history and to Western and non-Western cultures develops in students an understanding of: how music expresses the thoughts and feelings of a given historical time period; the way music functions similarly in different world cultures; the various ways string music is used in different world cultures.

Teaching Tips: Help students connect music exercises and repertoire with their historical context by presenting information (or having students seek out information) about composers. Be sure to select and perform music that represents a variety of musical periods and styles; regularly present opportunities for students to compare, contrast, and engage in written and aural reflection on the differences between various musics. Include in students’ musical diets authentically arranged examples of folk music from a variety of cultures. Have students connect the music they are playing with corresponding countries or areas on a world map. Bring into the classrooms persons from the community who are representatives of these geographic locations to demonstrate aspects of their culture. Have students search Internet sources for related materials.