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## **OF COURSE YOU CAN TEACH STRINGS! STRATEGIES FOR NEW AND WOULD-BE STRING TEACHERS**

With the national shortage of string teachers, some veteran music educators suddenly find themselves teaching strings for the first time. Others unexpectedly may be assigned to teach a different level of strings. For many of these teachers, years may have passed since that last string methods class! This session will provide clear and “do-able” teaching strategies for all string teachers - and particularly those who aren’t string players. Approaches to teaching beginning skills, intermediate techniques, fiddling, identification of resources, and other issues will be discussed. Bring an instrument-- and concerns specific to your own situation -- and join in! Teachers will receive free string teaching materials from Alfred Publishing Company.

### **Teaching Strings: Arguably Simpler than Teaching Band!**

- Only 4 instruments, 3 clefs – alternate notation systems apply to all
- Instruments can be sized and accommodated to the individual student
- Sound is produced the same for all – pizz and bow
- Pitch is changed in like manner for all (fingering theory)
  - *The teacher, student, and parent **can SEE everything** – including intonation!*
- Open strings for all instruments = 5 notes perfectly in tune on Day 1!
- A plethora of authentic music (traditions, styles, and genres)
- Basic rhythmic structure and agogic accents are enhanced naturally by gravity

***Survival – and SUCCESS – will depend on awareness of and adherence to proper, ordered SEQUENCE.***

### **Skill-based, Prioritized Sequence of Instruction**

#### **Structured upon:**

1. Aural skills – including beat internalization and singing
2. Establishment of comfortable position and format
3. Right-hand skills
4. Left-hand skills
5. Rhythm skills
6. Application of skills to varied motivational repertoire
7. Pitch manipulation/intonation skills
8. Skills to facilitate personal expression
9. Note-reading skills
10. Skills to facilitate speed and style

#### **Imbedded in all aspects of instruction:**

- Balanced approach to the National Standards
- Development of aural skills (i.e., through improvisation)
- Personal expression and musical independence
- Acknowledgement of individual needs
- Creativity (composition, arranging) & decision-making
- Contributions and commitment to the group
- Humor, drama, and imagination – fun
- Awareness of participation in the tradition
- *An awareness of the intended outcome*

For details describing this sequence, see “Skill Sequence Chart” in the Teacher’s Manual for *String Explorer Book I* and *String Explorer Book II* (pp. 12-13), by Andrew H. Dabczynski, Richard Meyer, and Bob Phillips, published by Alfred Publishing Company.

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**Primary Basic Skills/Issues Priority Order (heterogeneous class setting – based on *String Explorer* skill sequence)**

1. Instrument Selection and Sizing
2. The Bass Issue
3. Position Routine – “Statue of Liberty, Cello Triangle and Hugs,” Bass – sitting vs. standing
4. Banjo Position/Pizz – Echo games, “Open String Blues,” open-1 games
5. Right hand position – Rolland balance point vs. modified bow grip, French vs. German bow for bass
6. Four basic rhythm patterns – Aural/written: “Down-Up, Motorcycle Stop-Stop, Run Pony, Elevator Operator
7. Left hand position routine – imagery
8. Introduction to vibrato (continuously revisited, applied, and refined)
9. Awareness of pitch ascension/descension – “high vs. low” (loud vs. soft confusion) – singing, pitch matching
10. The issue of fingerboard tapes – pitch manipulation/slides
11. Pitch names vs. finger numbers vs. solfege
12. 4/4 Time – Duple subdivision (repeated eighths then moving eighths)
13. Quarter/eighth, half, dotted-half, whole – Suzuki: short-to-long – opposite of band
14. Dynamic Awareness (loud, soft) – 3 determinants: bow weight, speed, placement
15. Detache, marcato, staccato, legato
16. Modified symbol system
17. D-Ladder, A-Ladder → D Major (why start in D?) – then G, C, F, A, Bb, etc.
18. String crossings
19. Bass shifting vs. Alternatives (folding the octave, George Vance/Suzuki)
20. Developing finger pattern recognition – Scales, Arpeggios, Thirds, larger intervals
21. Learning tunes aurally
22. Musical Independence – Solo/Accompaniment roles
23. Music Reading (staff notation) – based upon already-known concepts now applied to symbology
24. Rests – Quarter, half, 3-beat, whole, eighth
25. Modified dynamic awareness (*mp*, *mf*)
26. Hooks and Slurs
27. Dotted-half notes
28. Ties
29. Left-hand pizz – 4<sup>th</sup> finger for violin/viola
30. Swing
31. Double-stops – an issue of the right elbow
32. Sophisticated dynamic awareness – crescendo, diminuendo, accents,
33. Sophisticated time awareness – accelerando, ritard, tenuto, fermata
34. Road map issues – including repeats, D.S., D.C., coda, etc.
35. E-ladder, C-ladder – avoidance of extensions
36. Eighth rest, eighth-quarter-eighth syncopation
37. Dotted-quarter/eighth
38. Natural signs (F-natural)
39. Backward extensions – preparatory to forward extensions

**Primary Basic Skills/Issues Priority Order (heterogeneous class setting – based on *String Explorer* skill sequence)**

\*\*\*Assumes that basic skills are in place, and can be continuously refined

1. Vibrato (continuously refined)
2. Harmonics
3. Tuning
4. Repeated 16<sup>th</sup> notes, moving 16<sup>th</sup> notes
5. A-Major (forward extensions), Bb major, harmonic minor scales and keys
6. Sophisticated extension of dynamic expression (*ff*, *pp*, *sfz*, *subito*)
7. Tremolo
8. 6/8 time signature
9. Shifting – 3<sup>rd</sup> position (violin, viola, cello), 4<sup>th</sup> position (cello), 5<sup>th</sup> position (bass)