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8:30am to 9:30am, Rm 3

Middle School Beginning Strings: Building Musical Foundations

Explore how to build a successful middle school beginning strings program from day one through the first year of instruction. Participants will examine strategies for instrument selection, establishing strong musical foundations before students ever pick up an instrument, developing music literacy, and creating engaging, sequential learning experiences that foster confident, independent musicians. Practical teaching ideas, classroom routines, and instructional approaches will help educators set students up for long-term success in their string program.

Venue Items Needed - Dry Erase Board
Display Screen
Projector
MacBook Air Connection (cable or air display)

Session Topics/Ideas

Pre-Instrument Activities

- Finger Taps - 3 taps per finger on thumb - slow to fast (homework)
- Hand Shapes - C, finger spacing, thumb placement
    - Make Ring - Tip of Finger - First Knuckle
- Pre-bow Activities
    - Wrist rotations (Pronate, Supinate) - Thumb direction
    - Bow Hold on finger (No weight - not going to fall=relaxed hand)
    - Bow Hold on Writing Tool (adding something lightweight - no grip)
    - Bow Hold on Straw (pressure check)
    - Bow Hold on Wooden Dowel (adding weight - maintain shape)
        - Rocket Ships (no weight)
        - Windshield Wipers (Weight)
        - Climb up and down (Dexterity)
    - Rhythm
        - Start with Keeping Steady Beat
            - Recordings - vary tempo (students identify speed)
            - Quarter vs. Eighth Notes - Similarities / Differences
    - Instruments
        - What are the options (Vln, Vla, Cll, Bs) (Pno/Hrp in Int/Adv)
        - Different presentations
            - Recordings (Male and Female players)
            - Pictures

        - Live Demonstration (same song!)
        - Physical Interactions
            - Students Hold a Cello - Put on Backpack
            - Bass - feel the vibrations along back
    - Instrument & Bow Parts and Vocabulary
        - Kahoot Check for Understanding
    - Instrument Care
- Note Identification (Later in process)
    - Worksheets for Each Clef
    - Complete worksheet for instrument they want to play
    - Piano players encouraged to do alto clef (or weaker clef)

Instruments! Yay!

- Selection via Google Form
    - Instrument selection 1st and 2nd choices
    - Students should know how many of each instrument you are looking for.
    - Petting Zoo - Student led (Third/Fourth Week of School)
        - 1st - Bow Hold Stations
        - 2nd - Instruments Stations (Pizz. only?)
        - Bow Station - helpful if time allows - can help recruit Cello/Bass
    - Cover Instrument Care - No Cars, Find Shady spots (afterschool sports), avoid rapid temperature changes, direct sunlight, etc.
- I start with Instrument alike Sessions
    - Violin and Viola together
    - Cello and Bass together (unless large sections)
    - Other students given worksheet and Sound Innovations Video(s)
    - Putting the instrument away safely (bow direction/bridge up)
- First Steps
    - How do I safely take my instrument out of its case
        - No bow on Day 1 (make sure they know to loosen - they WILL tighten)
        - They want to make sound - let them gently pizz and explore the instrument.
        - Start with positions
            - Rest Position
            - Travel Position
            - Guitar Position (Vln/Vla)
            - Play Position (pizz still)
        - Play Position
            - Hold instrument at the shoulder (Vln/Vla)
            - Seating straps & End Pins (Cll/Bs)
            - Pizzicato finger position & small circles
            - Echo Patterns - 3 quarters D/A Strings
                - Do several patterns
            - Start method book after a day or two of echo patterns.

            - Students should be able to echo A/D patterns
    - Daily Routines
        - Tuning
            - Starts with Teacher Tuning (A & D only to save time)
            - Fine Tuners (1-3 months in) - Students can begin to tune themselves
            - Intro to Pegs comes much later (4-6 months)
        - Echo Patterns (EP)
            - Review Instrument positions often
            - Review Open Strings - pizzicato until later in the year
            - Review all notes they have learned up to D Major scale
            - Intro new notes via rote echo patterns
            - Review and Introduce new Rhythms
            - Once the bow is used in the book - EP with the bow
                - Same process as above:
                    - Open Strings
                    - Review Notes
                    - Intro New Notes
            - End EP session with D Major Scale
                - Use even numbers of quarters notes for U/D bowing
                - Whole notes are hard for young strings players
                    - Due to keeping the bow parallel to the bridge
        - Method Book Lessons - Sept - March
        - Literature
            - Beginning arranged music around Jan
            - Start with music that has mostly unison rhythms/bowing
                - Miniature Symphony - 1. Modest March - Richard Meyer
                - Medieval Kings - Soon Hee Newbold

Other Concepts

- Bow (Start bow review activities by the second week of playing)
    - Layer in Bow Hold Review - at least every other day minimum (Pencil)
    - Layer in Bow movement activities
        - Rocket Ships
        - Windshield Wipers, etc
        - Find the Balance Point - balance on finger (or hang)
    - Use echo patterns - 4 note bowed patterns
        - DDDD (Echo), AAAA (Echo) repeat as needed
        - AADD(Echo, DDAA (Echo) repeat as needed
        - ADAD (Echo), DADA (Echo) repeat as needed, etc
- Shifting Introduction (Probably around March/April)
    - Readiness: At least a D Major Scale, but probably more
    - Introduction Process - Make part of your daily routine!!!
        - Clean the Fingerboard - thumb travels! (Day 1)
        - Use replacement approach

            - Pizz: “A, B, C#, D, rest, 1 beat to shift, D (-3)” (Day 2+)
            - Add bow day 4+
            - Pizz: “A, B, C#, D, 1 beat to shift, D (-3)” (Day 5+)
            - Add bow Day 6+
            - Pizz: “A, B, C# D, D(-3)” (Day 10+) (note only 8th note shift)
            - Add bow Day 10+
    - Spiccato (April/May)
        - Have students experiment bouncing the bow H/M/L
        - Ask them how much bounce is in each location
        - Introduce wide U shape
        - At the balance point (bounces easily, but easy to control)
        - Hair lifts off the string
        - Start slow and big, narrowing the distance - almost immediately
    - Extensions
        - Cellos will probably learn extensions earlier than Vln/Vla
        - Address as you learn scales (Ex: A Major)
        - Can be transferred to literature - when students ready
        - Vlns/Vlas - Save extensions for year 2 (unless necessary or Adv)
    - Vibrato Introduction (Probably around April/May)
        - Introduction Process (No/Minimal Sound) - Make part of your daily routine
            - Clean the Fingerboard (Day 1) - thumb travels!
            - Palm Pats (Day 2-3+)
            - Polish the String with each LH finger (Day 3+)
            - Slowing Decrease Distance on Polish (Day 6+)
            - Narrow Polish around 3rd position (Day 8+)
            - Don’t expect them to add to music YET

Metronome Usage

- The more you model use of the Metronome, the more the students will use it.
    - Band folks - start with Metronome around 74-80
        - If it’s too fast:
            - Bow Holds Get Losts
            - They can’t change direction fast enough
            - They can’t bow together
            - Yes, Direction matters - hold them accountable from Day 2.
- No you don’t have to use 100% of the time.
    - Use Youtube Drum Beats for variety - if classroom situation allows
    - Use Method Book Accompaniments - if classroom situation allows
    - Play the piano with them - as your piano skills allow (even a simple bass line)
    - Yes, conduct them and teach them to conduct patterns
    - Yes, conduct while the metronome is going

<u>Introduce</u> Concepts

- In beginning orchestra - Exposure is more important than perfecting the skills
- Think of introducing concepts as long term goal setting.
- New skills help students realize how important technique of the earlier skills are

- Students are watching videos of players and they want to know those concepts
- Normalize that it is okay to not perfect skills on day 1
- Normalize that Vibrato & Shifting are usually 3rd year concepts
- Normalize that Vibrato & Shifting are a major focus of “Int” Orch (or your version)
- Encourage them EVERYDAY - several times a period
- Start with familiar and then layer in variations (Ex: Eb/Bb - start with E/B)
- Break every new concept down into the smallest discrete skill you can think of
- Echo Pattern (no visual VERY important) every new skill - and each level of the skill
- Play various high quality recordings at least once a week. (Solos, Quartets, Full Orch)
- Use recordings that reflect your instrumentation
- Model as much as you are able on as many instruments as you are able
    - Yes Band Folk, that means you need to practice Vln, Vla, Cello, AND Bass.

Rhythm Games

- Pass the D around the room (less game, more check for understanding)
    - Choose A Pattern - Ex: 8th8th-Q-8th-8th-Q
    - Metronome on! (mm. 80-100)
    - Each students plays pattern one after the other (bar rest in between opt)
    - Challenge Mode: No break between students.
- Rhythm Pass - Student A Claps or Plays rhythm assigned to Student B
    - Students B has to recognize their rhythm, play it plus add another rhythm.
    - Now the student with that rhythm, plays their rhythm, plus another rhythm.
    - If they don’t play it correctly, they are out / end of line
    - Challenge Mode: When a student gets out, everyone shifts rhythms
- Rhythm Tag - need Pool Noodle (or other soft item)
    - Metronome On! (Or Music if you prefer)
    - Students with Noodle is “it”
    - It has to tap a student with the pool noodle, they then become “it”
    - The catch is they can only move one step on beat 1 (or beat(s) of your choice)
    - Great for teaching young students to count and feel four groupings.
- Play Along Videos

Presenter Items to Bring/Prepare

Violin
Wooden Dowels
Straws
Bow Frogs
Method Books / Vibrato Books
Handouts
QR code for Materials (Links)