

All-State: Planting Seeds for Advanced Techniques in the Middle School String Class

presented by Dr. James Kjelland
reported by Janet Anderson

Do we delay techniques because it's difficult or is it difficult because it's delayed? This is the question Dr. James Kjelland posed to us at the All-State Workshop. Kjelland says there is no physical obstacle to delaying any string technique. There is no state of readiness for vibrato, thumb position, shifting or finger patterns, except for having a normally functioning body. Bruner's theory is that any concept can be taught at any level. If it's too hard it's because we haven't simplified it enough.

In a first year the following techniques can be taught, according to Kjelland:

- Three bowings: detaché, spiccato, staccato/martelé
- Three patterns: major, minor and extended
- Duple and triple beat sub-divisions
- Shifting and vibrato motions
- Harmonics

A playing-in-tune idea from Kjelland:

have two instruments play the same note, everyone closes their eyes. The instructor plays with the tuning and students raise their hand when the sound is the same. Excellent idea for ear training. Students need to hear intonation. Intonation is an issue immediately for string players. To play in tune, you have to hear out of tune. Perception and coordination are necessary to play in tune.

Every day we need to work on student's ability to play in tune. Intonation is internal. When we make mistakes in intonation, we need to adjust our fingers. Back up and play into that note several times until we don't have to move our fingers. Invest time, Kjelland says, in teaching them how to do it.

Group teaching. Bringing the ensemble from pitch, to out of pitch, to back in pitch moves the thinking from my pitch to our pitch.

Merrily We Roll Along can be used to teach 4th finger. To teach shifting, try playing the piece with 1st finger on every note.

You don't have to mention shifting. We don't tell them that it's much more challenging to shift every note. The students will let go of the death grip of the neck by shifting early. The finger is not lifted; the contact remains until you go to an open note. The finger hydroplanes, Kjelland says, or glides like a magnet from note to note.

The Joy of Shifting and Double Stops by Jerry Lucktenberg is an excellent source for shifting at an advanced level. The students can play the melody on both strings. The neat thing is, Kjelland, is it sounds like country fiddle. This also gets the left hand up on the tips to get it out of the way of the strings. They will have a straight bow, pitch reference and when they come back to one string the sound is through the roof.

The question is again: do we wait until they are ready to do this? There is no such thing as readiness according to Kjelland.

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