Teaching Practices Article

A new model for the teaching violin to young learners

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Article Info	Abstract
	This article describes a different approach for learning a musical instrument using an unorthododox methodology in which music notes are not involved. My violin teaching method take the note – reading difficultuies out of the initial learning approaches. Therefore, the learner focuses more onto the physicial parts of the instrument at first such as holding, finger positioning, bow placing etc. Consequently, I have analyzed and researched on younger learners such as 3 to 5 years of age and discussed the benefits of helping the student at an early stage of learning.

To cite this article

Introduction

Violin playing is often preferred as an entertaining art activity for each child. A well-known conception is that first months of the education is quite difficult. To count some of the reasons for that understanding; standing up for some time, holding arms in a certain position, trying to coordinate two arms effectively to produce a good quality sound etc. are some of the challenging facts of the playing the instrument. Besides these physical challenges, the learning process adds reading the notes and finding them on the fretless instrument. All in all, these duties to play the violin becomes quite difficult.

In this methodology, I use a different approach to ease the note reading part of the challenges mentioned above. Especially for beginners within the early childhood education period, (3 to 6 years of age) matching each string with the notes on each of them could take some months to make a good sound.

Theoritical Framework

As every human being, we all learn everything in our early stages of life through symbols and shapes. We understand different shapes, different colors and transfer these signs into our daily life. Children start recognizing objects in their cradle through seeing animals and colorful pages in their books. Most researches indicate that the earlier boundary children have with books results better and faster learning in their school studies (Shatz, 1994: 40).

As it is described in early childhood education books, learning starts right after a baby is born. (Riley, 2003: 5). Sixths months into pregnancy, the auditory system of a child starts developing. (Hallam, 2001) Through imitating sounds, and facial expressions, even a month-old infant shows the indications of early learning process. Music in the early childhood education has also a big significance. Through research, we know that children at an early age are more

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dedicated to listening. It is quite natural for children to dance, try to sing, or imitate a piece of music at their early ages. It is also known that early years of musical education helps children to build their talent more efficiently (Riley, 2003: 205).

Learning through visual elements facilitates better learning as well as the use of long-term memory (Lohr, 2003:5) reports a well-known Chinese proverb "One picture is worth ten thousand words". Visual literacy can be classified as learning, understanding and constructing by using visual elements. Therefore visual learning has a long-lasting effect in the brain system. Consequently, it is safe to infer that it can promote cognitive learning. Scientists also indicate that the most effective learning happens when brain installs the information and makes coalition between the recently installed verbal or written information and its visual data. Every brain is unique, and each person has his/her own individual visual data that makes more sense to them through which information becomes more significant and more long-lasting (Lohr 2003: 56).

It is also explained in Brain-based learning that every human being has/her own learning method. The old model of teaching, also known as "behaviorist way of learning", was based on chastisement and prize. However, brain-based learning focuses on one individual's background and organizes an individual learning method. As it is widely known that some children are more resourceful and expressive than others because of their background. The old model of teaching tends to ignore the students that had a stressful childhood such as divorced parents, angered father or mother, etc. Because of these differences in one's childhood, brain-based learning suggests that in order to give a more productive education to a student, priority in teaching should be focused on discovering his/her way of learning. As one proverb explains "*You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink*" (Jensen, 2008: 5).

According to the famous developmental psychologist from Switzerland, Jean Piaget, in order to have an effective learning, a child should perform his/her activities at school or at home through making meaningful imagery storage in their mind. Piaget was the first psychologist that insisted on changing the old model of teaching. His theory started being recognized by educators around 1960s (Whitebread, 1999: 2). According to Piaget's theory, children learn seeing other children play or perform other activities, a child would receive the imagery information in their mind and by using their hands, and children reinforce the learning process even more (Sinatra, 1986: 8).

For newborn babies, the earliest learning happens through seeing objects. The length of remembrance period for a newborn is very limited, due to their limited length of memory, repeated action is necessary for them to build memories of games, facial expressions of parents, appearances of their toys. Infants remember their toys because of their toys' visual features, later on by repeated games with those toys establishes the audible features in an infant's mind. After repeated action is being placed in an infant's mind, the audible feature can be recognized right away. As it is known that infants recognizes every flying objects as birds while they might be seeing an airplane, a helicopter. As they are more exposed to outside activities, the difference of other flying objects will get give them a better and clearer idea. (Sinatra, 1986: 9)

Another idea for visual learning and its long-lasting storage is described by Allan Pavio in his Dual Coding Theory (Lohr 2003:58). In this theory, it is explained that every information goes through sensory memory and that perceived information is being sent to the other memories such as verbal memory and visual memory according to their type. Both verbal and visual memories are connected and their information can collaborate with one another. For instance; words such as "idea" will be directly sent to the verbal memory after it is being processed in the sensory memory but "violin" will be sent to the visual memory since it is more of an imagery element.

The importance of experience for learning is also very crucial in one's education. Through experiences, children learn better and improve their verbal or nonverbal learning by connecting the symbols that are learnt through playing and social interface. Visual literacy can also be explained as processing visual elements of past with current received images to acquire significance in meaningful learning (Sinatra, 1986: 5)

For instance, A child might think of string instruments family (violin, viola, cello and double-bass) as members of a kangaroo's family, double-bass is being the father, cello is being the mother and viola and violin are being the children.

In order to resemble those two completely different families, children must have had an experience either with a zoo or a television program that shows animal families. On the other hand, if a child, who has never experienced neither a zoo nor a television program about animal life, might not be able to tell the connection between a string instruments family and a kangaroo's family (Sinatra, 1986: 11)

By resembling instruments to animals can also be very helpful for children to remember instruments since they always watch cartoons and get to know the animals more than they know instruments. Experiencing different teaching methods for music can create better musicians starting at an early age and potentially it may also decrease the amount of technical difficulties of playing an instrument. Since an instrument will not be a part o children's daily life as a toy, by using symbols for strings can introduce the instruments in a more playful way and accelerate the learning faster for an child.

The Need for a New Approach in Violin Instruction

Learning how to play a musical instrument at an early age accelerates the potential of enjoying and performing music in the future of an individual's life. This study proposes a new approach to teach violin to young learners in a more effective way.

It is widely known that the earlier music education is perceived in an individual's life, the better quality of music is gained. Since classical music education has a significant part in many cultures, parents encourage their children to start their musical education during their early childhood period. This study offers a faster development in violin education at a very young age of an individual. With no doubt, it is very well believed that every instrumental education should be improved with the help of ear training. As one develops that skill in his/her early music education, it will be very helpful for them to progress faster in their instrumental studies. In this study it is aimed to find out if learning visual techniques as well as ear training can result in better, faster and more long-lasting success.

Implementation of Model

One may experience many difficulties with the violin learners at an early age. Especially' the ages between 3 to 5 can be quite critical. These problems can be classified as holding the violin, grabbing the bow in the correct way, keeping the bow moving straight and also most likely the biggest problem is finding the strings. I have discovered that using symbols for different strings have helped my students immensely and helped them progress much faster.

For instance; One day I was teaching W. A. Mozart's "Twinkle Twinkle Little Stars" to a student of mine who was 4 years old at the time. It took almost six or seven months for us to finish the entire piece. We started with the first A section then continued to the B section and repeated the A section at the end again. The main problem was finding the third finger on A string in order to play the note 'd', the student would either play the D string first or have hard time to find the third finger on A string. I initially thought that the problem with finding the A string was due to the wrong adjusting of the height of his right elbow according to the A string. Since both A and D strings are on an almost even surface, he was having a sharp adjustment problem with his right arm but after using the symbol ☆ for A string and □ for D string. My student has never been confused about differentiating the A string and the string.

The symbols can be extended to E and the G string as well such as using ◯ for the E string and △ for the G string. These are some symbols that preschool or even toddlers learn at home or at their preschool activities. In order for students to understand symbols, one may try drawing some of the symbols on paper and have the students draw the same symbols. After the symbols have been successfully recognized, instructor may try taking the bridge out and draw those symbols on the back of the bridge (see Photo 1) so that students can see the symbols easily.
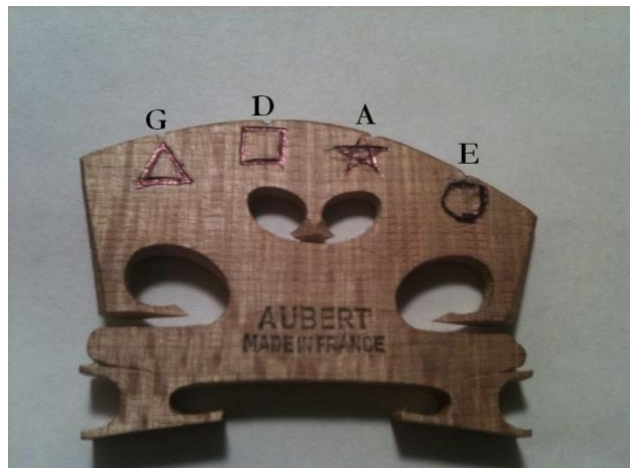
Photo 1. The violin bridge

As it is seen in Example I that D and A strings are almost on an even surface. Most of the time, young students have hard time distinguishing the adjustment of their right elbow accordingly for A and D strings. Therefore, instructors may find it more helpful to spend more time teaching those two strings at the beginning of their lesson, and then trying other strings would be followed.

It is very important for instructors to ask their students to play each string individually by using the entire bow in order to achieve a better bow technique from the earliest stages of their violin education. It is also crucial that students try exercising different styles of techniques with their bow such as Martelé, Staccato, and Legato etc.

An example of a piece which contains A string only would look like this ;

Figure 2. An example   Figure 3. Long notes

The duration of the notes will change based on their sizes. In this next example the size of the star changes since it's a longer note than others.

Conclusion

As it is stated in the previous paragraphs, playing any instrument can be quite difficult and worrisome for children under the age of seven. Outside of the technical difficulties, if the method of learning becomes more playful and more understandable the learning process becomes much easier as opposed to traditional learning methods where note reading is a big part of the learning approach. The instrument teachers may design their lessons based on their students ability to learn notes. For some, helping the students with some shapes and colors may speed up the process of learning and make their lessons more fun as they go through the stages of learning.

Dr. **Erman Türkili** started his music education at the conservatory of Cukurova University in Adana, Turkey In 1995,. At a young age, he appeared as a soloist and chamber music musician. In 2005, he was awarded with an assistantship from Pittsburg State University to continue his graduate education under the direction of Prof. Selim Giray. He won 4 competitions and became the state champion of the competition held by ASTA (American String Teachers Association). In 2007, he was awarded with an assistantship from Pittsburg State University to continue his doctorate education under the direction of Prof. Eliot Chapo who served as concertmaster as New York Philharmonic, Dallas Symphony and such. At the age of 26, he finished his education and received the 'DMA – Doctor of Music in Arts' title. Between the years of 2009 – 2019, he investigated the benefits of learning an instrument by using symbols and colors. He has been working with kids with spectrum as well as kids at an early age. He founded a learning center in Istanbul "House of Arts and Sciences", www.bskcocuk.com He also serves as an assistant professor at Bahceşehir University Conservatory and currently as the principal of the conservatory.

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