

String Methodology

IRMT Workshops, Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch,
Dunedin

Goetz Richter, Sydney Conservatorium

goetz.richter@sydney.edu.au



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY



Structure of the workshop

What is a teaching methodology for string players?

The elements of methodology:


- (1) conceptual foundations (principles): (a) the art itself – performance;
- (2) the context of learning – social, educational, specifics pathways (methods, strategies, etc..)
- (3) The “nuts and bolts” of string teaching: The technical elements supporting performance, artistic, cognitive, emotional, social elements. The performance teacher develops the person in her entirety

Discussion



What is a methodology?

- ▶ A way of progress -> **pathway (methodos)** of which we give an explicit **account**. (logos). Something we can give an account of -
> Is this useful? Yes, as it assists our reflection. Reflection furthers creativity if properly applied.
- ▶ Methodology can be **individualised**, flexible – methodology not a set of rules, recipes of application. Many methods -> foundation in human development (Howard Gardner)
- ▶ Methodology describes paths as **possibilities** – in some way unknown. Must be unknown to provide learning with the creative dimensions. Teachers need balance of conviction (action) and doubt (reflection)
- ▶ **Learning: open, dynamic activity. Autonomous.** Methodology needs to recognise this and leave options for exploration (creative)
- ▶ Useful: allows us to bundle experience, to contextualise our approaches and relate them to other fields... (physiology, psychology, cognitive sciences, sports science, etc)



Conceptual foundations (principles)

String Playing is...

Public: requirements to build resilience, self-sufficiency, autonomy

Creative, performative: future directed, no unpacking of ready-made solutions, limited use of automatisms and automatic responses, ability to think on the go. Thinking-in-action. Important to consider anticipation (relationship to sport)

Technique is movement based: important implications for a dynamic technical development (static concepts, positions, views of limited view)




Learning in context ...

Depending on contexts methods, strategies, approaches to develop string playing will vary...

Individual context: circumstances, aspirations, motivations. Individual possibilities. (eg. Available time, emphasis of the activity, etc)

Educational context: how does musical performance learning contribute to the educational opportunity? Central, peripheral, etc? -> teacher can position this in a limited way.

Social context: Is musical performance a way to enhance social competency, engagement -> individual vs. ensemble performance.



Developing method: didactic thinking and knowledge

Teaching and learning involve knowledge and practice. But: Know that ... Vs. ...
Know how...

Being able to do does not mean we know what we do... Knowing does not mean we can do...

Why do we need to know? In order to establish reflective practice.

Reflective practice may not be desirable for all levels of development
(presupposes levels of conceptual understanding, mental organisation and autonomous direction)

Autonomous learning requires reflective practice.

However: Knowledge is only a part of a string teacher's requirement: teachers need to think and act didactically, ie. they need to effect what students do, not merely what they know.

Principle of didactic thinking, action: The thinking, action itself is validated by the behaviour and practice of the learner.

Teachers transform observation, knowledge into particular, didactic strategies and actions to facilitate and promote learning and development



Ways of playing... What is technique?

Two ways of looking at technique:

- (1) technique as toolbox of tricks -> knack (instrumental)
- (2) technique as condition -> fitness (conditional)


Techné: originally “art” (of doing (*praxis*) or making (*poiesis*)) What are the opportunities and limitation of the separation of means and ends?

Flesch's pedagogical paradigm: The three targets of perfection: intonation, rhythm, sound quality -> teacher's responsibility is to assist in “mistake” removal (*Fehlerbeseitigung*) -> work-focussed pedagogy.

What is a mistake? How do we “remove” it?

Technique as performative skill -> relativity to purpose; technique is fused to intent.

“Good technique is good because it is not noticed”



Developing skills: Description and Discovery of Technique


Verification and perception of doing can occur in some or all relevant sense modalities: Aural, visual, kinesthetic (proprioception)

Ordinarily Theoretical descriptions of technique tend to be focussed on visual concepts. Accordingly, didactic instruction tends to be focussed on aural and visual correction -> this may not be effective as the student's access may be primarily **kinaesthetic** and needs to be directed towards **anticipation**.

Howard Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences -> teaching needs to find didactic access to student's way of making sense of the world. (skills are modes of being in-/ making sense of the world)

Teachers require a "**Phenomenology of technique**": translate descriptions across different sense modalities in a practical sense (multiple modes of directions)

Descriptions of what occurs versus descriptions of what needs to be intended, imagined, etc. -> performance an intentional art (mistake description enforces mistake -> principles of creativity) -> multiple directions to attention with student discovering content



Developing skills: (therapeutic practice..)

What teachers do...

Scaffolding:


Structuring progressions from simple to complex ->
simplification

Ordering tasks

Removing obstacles/ mistakes/ hindrances -> frustration
control

Developing autonomous learning: Positive conceptions;
resilience and (critical) verification of success

Contextualising technical development (means)



Foundation of string performance: Movement

Movement is the basis for performance

Free or balanced movement -> concentration on active and passive aspects (balance)

Movement is “felt” - kinesthesia

Rhythmic dimension of movement

Intentional vs. reflexive/ automatic movement -> [Wittgenstein: “Let us not forget this: When I raise my arm, my arm goes up. And the problem arises: what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm? (Are the kinesthetic sensations the willing?)”]

Movement is **correlated to intention and anticipation** (rhythm) -> often improvement to movement is achieved through **improvements in anticipation.**

Movement has rhythmic phases... Anticipation, actuality, recovery...



Muscles

Dualistic

Require recovery

Relay – it is possible to inhibit muscular effort. It is not possible to consciously and directly recruit particular muscles in our body -> physical action relies on indirect procedures.

Do muscles have memory?



Mind



Mind in the machine concept (Ryle)


Mind extends in- and through body for performers.

Perception determined by use of body -> imagination

Content of imagination -> metaphorical nature of imagination

How attention works

The plasticity of the brain



Kinaesthetic/ somatic knowledge and experience

Alexander Technique: The use of self; Focus on Primary Control (Head), inhibition; Relearn “corrupted kinesthesia”

Feldenkrais: Awareness through movement; observing our body, movement and building/ changing use. Focussed on Pelvis (Center) of body

Dalcroze: Eurhythmia – musicality through movement, rhythm




First foundation of movement: Rhythm

“Ear training alone will not make a child love and appreciate music; the most potent element in music and the nearest related to life, is rhythmic movement”
(E. J. Dalcroze)

Rhythm fundamental to music, playing, performance.

Rhythmic training is somatic... Theoretical understanding of rhythm is of limited use

Somatic conceptualisation of rhythm through body contact (NB:-> ethical issues)



The second foundation of Movement balance defines structure

Structural/static balance: starting/ recovery point of movement -> ex. Bow placement exercises

Balance of movement in time. -> creates structural balance and stability

Attention to balance is attention to effort reduction, unlocking joints and inhibiting excessive effort.



String playing as Performance & Play: Anticipation and Recovery -> the balance between imagination and perception

Didactic Implications of performance:

Learning processes of movement in stages: Rests and rhythm organises mental correlation and physical recovery. Feeling for rest and rhythm embedded in imagination.

Direct access to imagination and anticipation in practice
-> mental practice.

Relaxation exercises to calibrate body use. Practice and teaching uses deliberate Use of anticipation and recovery



Functionality and Artistic Playing

Focus on expression (appropriate experiential world) -> metaphorical imagination

Technical functionality provides stability of pitch, rhythm, tempo, etc

Technical fluidity and refinement. -> learning balance -> the need to cover new repertoire, course material. (boredom stress)

Balance of structure vs. play



Considering Development overall


Consolidated development of

- Technical skills
- Artistic Projection, individuality
- Musical/ semantic/ formal understanding
- Attention and Memory
- Resilience (...in public performance)
- Listening and collaboration
- Literacy
- Motivation... “happy...”



Six Principles of Movement and the development of technique (summary)

1. Technique is skillful – it is the effortless and essentially inconspicuous connection of musical imagination with actual playing.
2. The activity of musical performance requires the ability to play and listen. Playing requires openness to spontaneity, anticipation and a ready ability to work with musical imagination and intuition. Listening requires clear imagination, perception, and anticipation. Playing and listening depend on freedom and ease/ leisure of movement.
3. The common basis of music and technical skill is rhythm. It determines correlation, freedom of movement, musical form
4. The focus of technical development requires attention. Attention is paid. This means: only active attention can constitute playing and performance. Distraction, anxiety and frustration diffuse and undermine attention.
5. Accomplished technique is leisured. Attention to technique is active attention to leisure of movement. The promotion or manipulation of active movement itself is insufficient to establish technique. Effective attention to technical development includes active attention to passive movement or balance to establish leisured movement. Effortful , stiff or un-leisured movement sets limits to development. Leisured movement can be developed.
6. The student's practice is informed by feeling and attention in accordance with these principles. Teaching facilitates such learning and practice in a didactic manner and with consistent affirmation.



Instrumental Foundations: Posture and the position of the instrument

Mobility definition: posture is a balanced/dynamic stability which is open to (intentional) change at any time. (Dynamic Posture)

Body and instrument form a dialogical relationship- the body and its movement integrate the instrument. Bilateral movement.

The relationship of the instrument to the body is relative to the proportions of that body (shoulder width, arm length, etc)

Movements (can) corrupt(s) posture (through reaction, automatism, effortful movement);

Automated and reflexive movement which is corrupted affects balance -> focus on balance can restore natural flow of movement

The two contact points: right (mediated through bow); left: immediate



Practical Exercises

Posture Exercises: Pendulum Swings, Stretches. Residual tension reduce mobility and perception

Sitting Posture Ex.: “Jack-in-the-box”

Becoming aware of energy distribution in body and release of residual tension (balance board, diaphragmatic breathing exercises)

Instrument Placement: (Violin): Statue of Liberty



Instrument positioning

Dynamic positioning: All instrument positioning is balanced positioning... It is subject to change and change of this position must become a factor in the student's relationship with the instrument.

Shoulder-rest and chin rest (violin, viola) -> practical implications: teachers need equipment ready-to-hand in lessons.

Freedom in neck, jaw, head -> occlusion of left shoulder in violinists.

Spike, stool (cello, bass) -> stool/ chair height needs thought. Spike length needs to be verifiable by student at home.

Instrument elevation (violin), angle; instrumental height, angle (cello).



The left hand

Principles of balance: thumb and fingers

The concept of positions (*gridiron*- Campagnoli);
Galamian's "frame". The limitations of Galamian's
frame concept. The dynamic requirements of a left
hand conception.

Left hand mobility: balancing joints. Working on active
release of balancing joints. -> the principle of passive
movement in the left hand.

Rhythmic action of the left hand -> timing and correlation

Left Hand technical themes: Independence and Double
Stopping, Shifting, Vibrato



Establishing Foundations of Left Hand technique

(Violins):

Statue of liberty (violin position)

Handshake – releasing shoulder/back tension

Magic X (Zweig)

Early exercises: tapping, pizzicato (tuning!)

Balancing hand position -> is there such a thing as hand position -> the finger contact point -> the manifold descriptions of left hand action

Principle of “left-before-right” (correlation). Anticipation and mental practice.



Setting up left Hand

- ▶ Principles of movement: Balanced system (thumb vs fingers). Active vs passive.
- ▶ Hand contact points – touch contact (hand, fingers) (Zweig. Magic X)
- ▶ Introduction of all fingers ?
- ▶ Arches: Physiology of fingers/ hands; “springs”, relay of effort, recovery of impulses (cyclic concept of physical action); the importance of rhythmic practice (physical co-ordination)
- ▶ Mechanical vs. dynamic principles
- ▶ Connection between imagination and hand -> reactive vs creative. Psycho-Physical issues



Technical Topics

Shifting: Indirect procedures vs manipulation -> balance and release; when do we introduce shifting?

Vibrato: the three types, Rivarde's Vibrato Exercise; when do we introduce vibrato?

Left hand action and independence (bass joint exercises - > Flesch's basic studies)

Working on the fourth fingerfrom the start



Didactic Considerations: the burden of intonation

The context dependency of intonation-> harmonic vs. melodic intonation

Intonation, rhythmic movement and balance -> intonation is a “secondary” phenomenon (underlying primary phenomena include... Correlation, rhythmic movement, balance, etc)

The creative intentionality of performance: intonation is a result of clarity of conception (listening), ease of movement (balance), resilience (concentration) and alacrity (hearing).



Foundations of right Hand Development

Bow and Bow-Hold.

The absurdity of the concept of the bow hold

The role of the hand as a hinge -> Galamian's principles of bow hand rotation

Finger contacts and the development of the bow hand through balance and rhythm



Set up right hand

Concept of bow hand, Galamian: five rotational direction. Finger placement. (Metaphorical models -> Givens)

Bow hand “feel” vs. mechanical determination

Bow hand as hinge – transmission of arm movements/ body energy to strings -> Thumb?

Set up of right hand related to arm and arm movements

Different properties/ feel of bow hand in different strokes




Practical Exercises to develop bow hand flexibility

Balance hand action: sea-saw, windscreen-wipers, knuckle-push-ups, finger-stroke

Developing bow hand balance in relation to body balance: bow placement and bow stroke exercises, unlocking exercises

Active versus passive movements in bowing technique



Development of Sound and Strokes

Contact of bow with string: Concept of Contact Point
(Trendelenburg, Flesch)

Dependency of Contact point on Length of string, speed of bow, pressure on string.

Inclination of bow (roule)

Development of sound (Tartini, French School -> Sons files; Flesch -> Portato; Suzuki -> tonalisation exercises);
Development of Contact Point understanding, feel and variation.

Development of bow speed/ distribution



... Strokes

- Classification of Strokes according to methodic introduction
- On
 - Detache
 - Legato
 - Mixed (even and uneven bow distribution)
 - Staccato/ articulated strokes -> Martele, Hooked, Viotti, Slurred Martele, Portato
- Off
 - Spiccato
 - Sautille
 - Rebound: Ricochet
 - Off string staccato
- Mixed



Stroke, Left Hand Co-ordination, artistic playing

Strokes, Sound and sound development ultimately dependent on bilateral co-ordination -> not sufficient to concentrate on properties of strokes, consider methods of bilateral co-ordination

Development of rhythmic co-ordination part of development of strokes and sound

Method: Separation of left/ right. Rhythmic methods to introduce/ consolidate strokes.

Dynamic, rhythmic variety to fully establish skill

Bibliography.. On thinking, learning & teaching

- Alexander, F. M (2001). *The use of self*. London: Orion
- Dalcroze, E (1921). *Rhythm, Music and Education*. New York: Putnam
- Doidge, N. (2007). *The Brain that changes itself*. Melbourne: Scribe
- Feldenkrais, M (1990). *Awareness through movement*. New York: Harper Collins
- Gardner, H. (1983) *Frames of Mind: the theory of multiple intelligences*. New York: Basic Books
- Hallam, S. (1998) *Instrumental Teaching: a Practical Guide to better Teaching and Learning*, Oxford: Heinemann
- Kempler, S (2003). *How Muscles Learn- Teaching the Violin with the Body in Mind*. Summy Birchard Music
- Erikson, K. A. Et al. (1993). "The role of Deliberate Practice in the Acquisition of Expert Performance", *Psychological Review*, 1993, 100, 3, 363-406.
- Medoff, L. (1999). "The importance of movement education in the training of young violinists" in: *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, December 1999
- Noe, A (2006). *Action in Perception*. Cambridge: MIT Press
- Richter, G. (2011). "Shifting the Paradigm of Violin Playing: The Significance of Friedrich Adolph Steinhausen", in *String Praxis*, 1, 1, 34-43. www.stringpraxis.com
- Ryle, G (1949). *The concept of mind*. London: Penguin
- Schoen, D. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. Sand Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Shustermann, R. (2008). *Body Consciousness- A philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Bibliography... (on “nuts and bolts”)

- Alcantara, Pedro de. (1997). *Indirect Procedures- A Musician's Guide to the Alexander Technique* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Capet, Lucien. (1993). *La Technique Supérieure de L'Archet*. U.S.A: Encore Music Publishers, 1993.
- Fischer, Simon. (1997) *Basics*. London: Edition Peters.
- Flesch, Carl. (1911) *Ursudien (basic studies) for violin*. New York: Carl Fischer.
- Flesch, Carl. (1930) *The Art of Violin Playing, Book One*. New York: Carl Fisher.
- Flesch, Carl. (1930) *The Art of Violin Playing, Book Two: Artistic Realisation and Instruction*. New Galamian, Ivan. (1962) *The Principles of Violin Playing and Teaching*. London: Prentice-Hall.
- Flesch, Carl. (1934) *Problems of Tone Production in Violin Playing*. New York: Carl Fischer
- Gerle, Robert. (1991). *The Art of Bowing Practice*. London: Stainer and Bell Ltd.
- Hodgson, P. (1958). *Motion study and violin bowing*. Urbana: American String Teachers' Association
- Kempter, Susan. (2003). *How Muscles Learn: Teaching the Violin With the Body in Mind*. U.S.A: Summy-Birchard Music
- Kimber, Michael. (1992) “Teaching a melodic/harmonic awareness of intonation“ in: *American String Teacher*, Spring 1992, pp. 59-63
- Palac, J. A. (1992). “Violin Bowing Technique: An Analysis of Contemporary Pedagogical Literature According to Principles of Human Movement“ in: *Medical Problems of Performing Artists*, 7, 30-34.
- Richter, Goetz (2013). “Clear Versus Correct: On the Re-conceptualisation of judgements about intonation“ in: *String Praxis*, Vol 2, 1, Oct. 2013. 31-46. www.stringpraxis.com
- Rolland, P. (2000). *Basic Principles of Violin Playing*. Bloomington: Tichenor.
- Rolland, Paul. (1974) *The Teaching of Action In String Playing*. Illinois: Illinois String Research Associates.
- Rostal, Max (2005) *A handbook of Violin Playing- A vademecum for students and professionals*. Berne: Mueller Schade.
- Tartini, (1967) *A letter from the late Signor Tartini to Signora Maddalena Lombardini*, New York: Johnson Reprint.
- Tortelier, Paul. (1976) *How I Play, How I Teach*. London: Chester Music.
- Young, Phyllis. (1978). *Playing the String Game: Strategies for Teaching Cello and Strings*. Austin: University of Texas.
- Zweig, Mimi. www.violinpedagogy.com