

Teaching string technique through culturally diverse music

by

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Abstract

Utilizing culturally diverse folk songs in the orchestra classroom as a supplement to popularly used method books cultivates a positive environment for student learning and can also be used to teach a broad spectrum of technical skills. I taught the students the folk song *A la rorro niño*, a Mexican folk song as notated by Beth Thompson on her blog bethsnotesplus.com (2020). Through correspondence with Thompson, I learned that she had collected this song from her mother-in-law aurally. I have also used Karen Howard's book *First Steps in Global Music* (2020) to find more information about this song. During my lessons we briefly discussed the history of the song, then used it to practice slur versus staccato articulations with my fifth grade beginning students and shifting and vibrato with my eighth grade students. In both classes the lesson was designed to support the advancement of performance technique while also including and uplifting a staple of the Mexican folk song tradition.

I always knew my approach to teaching string students would include a strong set-up routine. The set-up and performance technique for string players is vital to preserving the joy in making music, preventing injuries commonly suffered by long-term string players, and also providing the groundwork for learning more advanced techniques as they grow as musicians and string players. Within some of my initial coursework in this Masters' program, my professors affirmed this instinct and provided the structure and tools to explore and develop this passion. I also hold a strong belief that music education should serve as a vessel for broadening cultural awareness. Music exists in a unique cultural niche, as it is an international language and simultaneously an art form that can represent a fraction of society. This Masters' program has guided my ability to incorporate this belief into the orchestra classroom. Within my project I utilized a Mexican folk song to teach performance techniques that reinforce a proper set-up for

holding and playing their instruments with the intention of creating comfortable, joyous string players.

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Chapter 1 - Teaching Philosophy

Like a pendulum swinging in perpetuity, so shifts the opinions, values, actions, and politics, of a given society from one thematic lens to its opposite and back. Paulo Freire reflects on this affective relationship by observing that, “historical themes are never isolated, independent, disconnected, or static; they are always interacting dialectically with their opposites” (1993, p. 74). Freire suggests that, “[t]hematic investigation thus becomes a common striving towards awareness of reality and towards self-awareness, which makes this investigation a starting point for the educational process or for cultural action of a liberating character” (1993, p. 80). Music education is not immune to these historical epochs, as the support of public music programs has been in flux since their inception. I believe that music education, when explored from a global perspective, can strengthen a student’s grasp on the reality that is the human condition, thus breaking the perpetual nature of cycling through these opposing themes, and creating a more compassionate society.

“Compassion is noted as a requisite for anyone working in a helping profession such as teaching, medicine, or psychology. In a field such as music, where expression and personhood intermingle with the content itself, compassion may be even more critical.” (Hendricks, 2018, p. 3). Music is uniquely positioned between objective complexity and subjective artistry. Through the study of music, a person must utilize analytical logic simultaneously with empathetic compassion. Estelle Jorgensen says that, “[m]usic seems to transcend cultural boundaries because its significance may be grasped, at least partly, by others from different social and cultural backgrounds, yet it is also intimately bound to a particular social group or society, and outsiders cannot fully understand it” (1997, p. 1). It is through the objective observation of those cultural differences that self-growth begins. Thus, I would like to offer a two-prong perspective

in my philosophical approach to music education. The first focusing on the contextual study of music, and the second on the modeling of and positive reinforcement of intentional musical expression, both of which should be happening simultaneously.

To address the latter first, in my perspective, the joy of music making is susceptible to loss when militant means are employed to achieve pristine musical performances. In order to preserve said joy, a balance must be struck between technical execution and musical expression. As a music educator it is our responsibility to model with as much technical accuracy as possible, and to openly own and correct our technical mistakes while simultaneously modeling a mature expressive musical voice. Utilizing a systematic breakdown of technical skills deployed in conjunction with pre-teaching strategies can support broader technical success within a classroom of learners despite varying learning styles. Through strategic sequencing of skills differentiated instruction can be achieved if kinesthetic, aural, and visual components comprise these sequential activities. There is a common misconception that only some people possess an intangible well of natural talent. In the following quote, Shinichi Suzuki attempts to dispel this notion,

“I have no talents”—what sadness and despair are occasioned by this nonsensical belief! For years, people everywhere have succumbed to this false way of thinking, which is really only an excuse for avoiding work...Every child can be educated; it is only a matter of the method of education. Anyone can train himself [or herself]; it is only a question of using the right kind of effort. (1969, p. 37)

In order to achieve the “right kind of effort,” as Suzuki put it, students must approach the learning with an open mind and be engaged in a joyful experience.

Another way to describe an open mind would be Carol Dweck's definition of growth mindset (2006). A student must believe that their knowledge and abilities are malleable in order to allow themselves to grow. One way I encourage a growth mindset in my classroom is by employing the common refrain, "I cannot do it... yet!" With this mindset it is much more likely to engage the students in the "right kind of effort" as suggested by Suzuki (1969, p. 37).

On the subject of joy, Zoltán Kodály believed that if we, "[t]each music and singing at school in such a way that it is not a torture, but a joy for the pupil; instill a thirst for finer music in him [or her], [it will be] a thirst which will last for a lifetime" (1974, p. 120). Finding music and activities that promote student joy in the classroom is an unmatched resource when it comes to actively engaging students. Student comfort is another factor in protecting the joy in music making. The technical demands of playing a string instrument are extremely physical and if a student is experiencing pain or discomfort that experience can quickly rob that student of their joy. I believe that once a student is able to focus on these technical elements in a joyful way, then they may find the ability to explore musical expression, no matter the level of their technical achievements.

To return to the first prong in my philosophical approach to music education, I believe that the exploration of relevant contextual factors of music, woven into the daily technical approach, can only deepen student learning and enhance their musical expression. This type of immersion functions better when explored within student-led activities. When students use their sense of curiosity and discovery, they will feel more empowered to make their own decisions regarding musical expression. Jorgensen reminds us of the Gaia hypothesis which, "posits that all things on planet earth comprise part of an interconnected dynamic system in delicate balance, where the whole transcends the sum of its parts" (1997, p. 3). If there is even a chance that this is

the level at which our world is interconnected, then we owe it to our students to present the subject of music on a global level in order to promote international cooperation. Karin Hendricks, in her seminal book, *Compassionate Music Teaching: A Framework for Motivation and Engagement in the 21st Century*, furthers the stakes of student-led learning in this summative statement,

If approaches or words focus the students' attention on meeting the teacher's requirements or pleasing the teacher, or if they don't allow space for self-assessment or self-expression, then they do not fit under this book's definition of compassion, no matter how well intended they may be. (2018, p. 9)

One practical tool for promoting student curiosity suggested by Hendricks is to tailor your language through guiding, inspiring, connecting, and goal-clarifying questions. This type of tool can also be applied when encouraging student interest in the context of the diverse music that is presented.

I believe that when students are guided towards successful technical and musical expression while engaging in genuine curiosity of the cultural significance of the musical representations it is possible to create joyful and independent musicians. The students must take ownership of their learning within a safe environment. The teacher must acknowledge the equality of the human nature experienced and displayed by themselves and their students and actively work to dismantle any existing power struggle for, "as long as there is a power struggle, true learning cannot take place—at least not the learning that is intended" (Hendricks, 2018, p. 5).

How My Philosophy Informs My Teaching

Within the lessons presented in this report, I hope to reflect my passion for representing diverse musical viewpoints. In both the Fifth Grade Strings Lesson and the Eighth Grade Orchestra lesson I utilize a Mexican folk song called *A la rorro niño* (Howard, 2020; Thompson, 2020). My intention is to weave together the exposure to a new culture with the strategically sequenced introduction to new technical skills. This is a direct reflection of the two main priorities of my teaching philosophy: studying the cultural context of diverse music and encouraging students to demonstrate intentional musical expression beginning with comfortable and repeatable technical skills. I intend to develop a strong structure for integrating cultural context throughout my orchestra program supported by creating significant, tangible, measurable, program-wide outcomes. This structure, along with technical skill, will inform the choices that I make for every ensemble regarding programming. I believe this could be supported by the eventual development of a library of pieces for my orchestra program that is organized by technical skills and cultural context. Ultimately, I aim for my orchestra classroom to be a safe place for musical and global discovery, where students can grow while experiencing the joy that comes from making music.

Chapter 2 - Lesson Plan(s)

The following chapter will provide the details of two lesson plans I designed and executed with the intention of using a culturally diverse folk song to teach string instrumental technique. The first is a lesson designed for the Fifth Grade After School Strings Program. This group is comprised of 26 students in the fifth grade all between the ages of 10, 11, or 12 years old. In this school district, the fifth grade is the first opportunity students are given to begin learning to play a string instrument, at which time they are given the option of violin, viola, cello, or bass. In this class, 17 students' families rented their instruments, 4 students owned their own instrument, and 5 students borrow instruments that are owned by the district. This class meets for 45 minutes after school on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the majority of the school year. The following lesson was taught in the latter part of the spring semester, so at the time of the lesson the students had been playing for about 6 months. There are 3 students in the class that had taken piano lessons or other instrumental lessons privately prior to beginning this class. In this strings class 14 of the students play the violin, 4 students play the viola, 5 students play the cello, and 3 students play the bass.

The second lesson detailed below is designed for an Eighth Grade Orchestra class. In this specific class there are 14 students all in the eighth grade, all ages 13, 14, or 15 years old. The eighth grade students in this district had the opportunity to start playing a string instrument in the Fifth grade during the after school program. Starting in sixth grade, orchestra class is offered as a daily elective in three different sections. The Eighth Grade Orchestra is for all eighth grade students interested in playing an orchestra string instrument, with no prerequisites. In this particular class there are 9 students that have three or more years of experience on their instrument, 2 students that have between two and three years of experience, and 3 students that

have less than 1 year of experience. There are 8 students that borrow a school instrument and 6 students that own their own instrument. The instrumental breakdown in this class is very balanced with 7 violin players, 2 viola players, 3 cello players, and 2 bass players. Two of the students in this class have taken three or more years of private piano lessons.

For the following lessons I decided to utilize the Mexican folk song, *A la rorro niño*, a traditional lullaby often sung in celebration of the Christian holiday of Christmas in reference to baby Jesus (Thompson, 2020). I originally encountered this song in a workshop and subsequently went on a search to find an original source for this song on my own. There are many references to this song or extremely similar songs with only slight variation in lyrics and melodic structure. The Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has collected Ed Trickett's recording of the song on an album call *Gently Down the Stream of Time* (1977). The USC Digital Folklore Archives only has a documentation of the lyrics, which matched the version that I had learned, collected from a phone interview with an unnamed primary source stating that her parents, born in Mexico, used to sing it to her as a child, but it was without any melodic notation or recording (Madeleiw, 2020). Karen Howard's book, *First Steps in Global Music*, has a version with quite a bit of variation stating that this was collected from Guatemala (2020, p. 103).

The version that I chose to use is the version provided by Beth Thompson on her website *bethsnotes.com* (2020). I chose this version because it was the most similar to the version I had learned and it is also the most representative of the colloquial versions that are found in the Mexican culture. I was able to reach out to Thompson via email correspondence to inquire about her source for this particular version of the song and she replied that she had learned it from her Mexican mother-in-law. She also recommended one video version that she thought was most

similar to the version she had collected that was uploaded to youtube.com by ChiquitinesTV (2016).

Both of the following lessons are designed to introduce the song to the students via singing while learning about both its cultural context as well as its melodic structure. As the students become acquainted with the song, the song is then utilized to teach a technical skill on their instruments. In the Fifth Grade Strings Lesson Plan the teacher will guide the students to use the sequencing of Say, Say and Do, Whisper and Do, then Do to familiarize themselves with the notes and rhythms in this piece, independent of each other. Once the students are familiar with the song and can play the notes and rhythms with high levels of accuracy, the teacher will introduce two new bow techniques, staccato and slur. In the Eighth Grade Orchestra Lesson Plan once the students have become familiarized with the song, the students will practice sightreading techniques to play the song. The lesson then transitions into utilizing the song to reinforce the skills of shifting, the concept of *sul D*, and vibrato, through sequenced activities.

Fifth Grade Strings Lesson Plan

2014 Music National Standards

MU:Pr4.2.E.5a Demonstrate, using music reading skills where appropriate, how knowledge of formal aspects in musical works inform prepared or improvised performances (2014).

MU:Pr5.3.E..8a Develop strategies to address technical challenges in a varied repertoire of music and evaluate their success using feedback from ensemble peers and other sources to refine performances (2014).

MU:Pr6.1.E.8a Demonstrate attention to technical accuracy and expressive qualities in prepared and improvised performances of a varied repertoire of music representing diverse cultures and styles (2014).

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students can demonstrate knowledge of appropriate set-up for holding/playing their instruments with their bodies and left/right hands.

Students can demonstrate knowledge of playing and reading the notes in first position in the left hand.

Students can use their bows to make a full sound on all four strings.

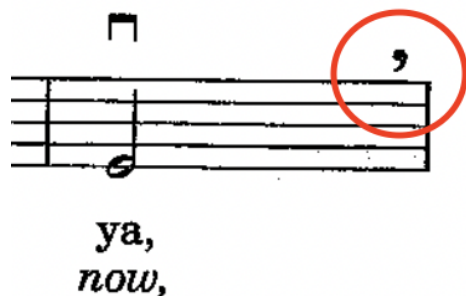
Students can comfortably play string crossings within a melody.

Students can demonstrate knowledge of playing and reading quarter notes, eighth notes, and half notes.

Students know visual representation for down bow and up bow as well as can demonstrate the skill of moving bow in both up and down bow motions.

Students know the visual representation for bow lift (figure 2.1) as well as can demonstrate the skill of lifting bow after a down bow to play another down bow.

Figure 2.1 - Bow lift notation



Rehearsal Objective

Introduce students to the concept of, decoding of visual representation of (figure 2.2), and skill of staccato style bowing.

Introduce students to the concept of, decoding of visual representation of (figure 2.3), and skill of slurred bowing.

Students will demonstrate knowledge of the song *A la rorro niño* as well as its cultural context.

Figure 2.2 - Staccato notation



Figure 2.3 - Slurred notation



Assessment of the Rehearsal

Students will sing the song as a class to demonstrate knowledge of the melody and Spanish language lyrics.

I will use group question/answer format to assess that students relate the meaning of the song to rocking a baby to sleep with a lullaby.

Students will play each style of bowing as a whole group where I can visually assess bow movement individually.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed

During modeling portion of new song, sing the song multiple times and in small sections to provide many repetitions of new material.

Prepare and utilize, as needed, supplementary rhythm and melodic sequencing.

For time and success of goals, may shorten activities to only 2 or 4 bars of the song, measures 1-4, rather than entire song, as shown in figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4 - To save time in rehearsal, activities may be shortened to only the first four measures, as shown here.

Violin

A la rorro niño

Mexican Folk Song

The image shows a musical score for a violin part of a Mexican folk song. The score is written on a single staff in treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 2/4. The melody consists of eight measures. The first four measures are enclosed in a red rectangular box. The lyrics are written below the staff, with Spanish and English translations provided for each measure. The first line of lyrics is: "A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya," with the English translation "A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,". The second line of lyrics is: "Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor." with the English translation "Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.".

Adjust tempo of song as needed to accommodate abilities in the moment throughout lesson.

During the Rehearsal Plan there are references to the Orchestra President and Orchestra Secretary as this class elected officials to take care of meeting business. This structure was implemented in an effort to encourage and support individual student ownership over their learning and involvement in this class.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Students need instruments: either violin, viola, cello, or bass, with their bow.

Handout of song sheet for *A la rorro niño* for each student written for their instrument, see Appendix A, figures A.1-A.4.

Rehearsal Plan

Table 2.1 - Fifth Grade Strings Rehearsal Plan

| Time | Activity | Purpose of Activity | Sequence | Assessment |
|--------|-------------------------|---|--|---|
| 5 min | Introduction/ Tuning | Prepare instruments for rehearsal by tuning all strings to match. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orchestra Secretary provides update on old and new business. • Orchestra President leads tuning. • Use upper half of bow, play quietly, smoothly and slowly with bow. • All students play A string while teacher moves through room to check. Do the same for all strings: D, G, C, E. | Throughout this time, teacher assess student set-up & posture by making adjustments while moving through room tuning instruments. |
| 5 min | Warm-ups | Prepare student readiness for technical practice on their instrument. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orchestra President leads warm-ups. • Play 4 quarter notes with full bow on each string, starting with C string. • Play 4 quarter notes with full bow on each string alternating fingering of open string and 1st finger. | During student-led warm-up, teacher moves through room assessing student set-up & posture. |
| 10 min | <i>A la rorro niño</i> | Inform students of the song through melody, lyrics, and cultural context. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand out the song page and sing song to students. • Explain meaning of lyrics while singing small chunks of the song at a time and having students repeat. • Explain cultural context. • Engage students through group question and answer about concept of lullaby and cultural use of the song in Mexico, both as a commonly used lullaby, and its ties to the Christian holiday of Christmas in which the song is used as a lullaby for Jesus. • Have class sing the song using Spanish lyrics. | <p>Informally assess students through whole-group question and answer during teacher lecture.</p> <p>Aurally assess whole class understanding of lyrics and melody while whole class sings.</p> |
| 5 min | Rhythm breakdown | Acquaint the students with the rhythm of the song. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a class, say the rhythm of the song in rhythm shorthand (ti-ti, ta, ta-o). • Say and clap the rhythm (assess student comprehension and omit this and further steps in this sequence as necessary). • Clap rhythm. • Play rhythm only on open D string, pizzicato then bowed. | Teacher assesses by watching and listening to whole group participation. |

| | | | | |
|-------|-------------------|--|---|--|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play rhythm only bowed with lifts. | |
| 5 min | Melodic breakdown | Acquaint the students with the melodic structure of the song. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students turn to a neighbor and discuss the note names in the first 2 measures. • Say note names in correct rhythm as a class for first two measures. • Say note names while moving left fingers on fingerboard to correct notes. • Pizzicato first two measures; then play with bow. • Repeat above sequence with the next two bars; continue in 2 bar chunks until you have completed entire song, or just 4 bars, depending on time. • Play 4 bar phrase, m 1-4, with the bow, with bow lifts. | <p>Peer assessment through partner work.</p> <p>Teacher assesses by watching and listening to whole group participation.</p> |
| 5 min | Staccato bowing | Introduce students to the definition of, decoding of the visual representation of, and skill of staccato style bowing. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have student read definition of staccato from handout, as seen in Appendix A, figures A.1-A.4. • Play the first 2 notes of <i>A la rorro niño</i> in staccato style. • Play 3rd and 4th notes in a staccato style. • Play entire 1st measure in staccato style. • Play measures 1 & 2 in staccato style as a whole class. • Depending on time, either repeat this sequence in 2 bar chunks through end of song, or move on to next activity. | Teacher assesses by watching and listening to whole group performance. |
| 5 min | Slur bowing | Introduce students to the definition of, decoding of the visual representation of, and skill of slurred bowing. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have student read definition of slur from handout, as seen in Appendix A, figures A.1-A.4. • Have students pull a down bow on open D string, then place 1st finger E while continuing with the down bow. • Have students practice independently, briefly, then again as a class. • Play the first 2 notes of <i>A la rorro niño</i> in a slur. • Play 3rd and 4th notes in a slur. • Play entire 1st measure with slurs. • Play measures 1 & 2 with slurs as a whole class. • Depending on time, either repeat this sequence in 2 bar chunks through end of song, or move on to next activity. | Teacher assesses by watching and listening to whole group performance. |
| 5 min | Closing | Finish lesson with pack-up and reminders. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind students to pack up instruments correctly (loosen bow, wipe strings and body with rag, pick up chairs & stands). • Wish students a wonderful weekend. | Teacher moves through room watching as students pick up, giving reminders as needed. |

Eighth Grade Orchestra Lesson Plan

2014 Music National Standards

MU:Pr4.2.E.5a Demonstrate, using music reading skills where appropriate, how knowledge of formal aspects in musical works inform prepared or improvised performances (2014).

MU:Pr5.3.E.8a Develop strategies to address technical challenges in a varied repertoire of music and evaluate their success using feedback from ensemble peers and other sources to refine performances (2014).

MU:Pr6.1.E.8a Demonstrate attention to technical accuracy and expressive qualities in prepared and improvised performances of a varied repertoire of music representing diverse cultures and styles (2014).

Prior Knowledge/Skills

Students can demonstrate knowledge of appropriate set-up for holding/playing their instruments with their bodies and left/right hands.

Students can demonstrate knowledge of first position in the left hand and basic first position note reading skills.

Students can demonstrate a familiarity with performing the warm-up patterns within the Rehearsal Plan.

Students can demonstrate decoding of visual representation of and skill of a bow lift (figure 2.1).

Students can demonstrate knowledge and performance of preparatory movements for developing shifting skills.

Students can demonstrate knowledge and performance of preparatory movements for developing vibrato.

Rehearsal Objective

Students will play *A la rorro niño* sul D string, or only on the D string, utilizing shifting techniques and also using vibrato on the half notes.

Students will recognize and decode the symbol for a shift in written fingerings (figure 2.5) as an angled line.

Students will know the definition of *sul D* as indicating that the passage should be played only on the D string.

Students will demonstrate knowledge of the song *A la rorro niño* as well as its cultural context.

Figure 2.5 - Notation for shift as slanted line within fingering.



Assessment of the Rehearsal

Students will sing the song as a class to demonstrate knowledge of the melody and Spanish language lyrics.

I will use group question/answer format to assess that students relate the meaning of the song to rocking a baby to sleep with a lullaby.

Students will play in small groups demonstrating the shifts and use of vibrato so I can visually assess individual understanding.

Relevant Contextual Factors and Modifications/Accommodations Needed

This class only contained violins and violas on the day this lesson was taught due to absences for school activities and personal reasons.

The warm-up used within this Rehearsal Plan is one that has been used many times within this class. If a new student were present or this lesson were taught to a fully unique class, this would need to be explained, step-by-step.

During modeling portion of new song, sing the song multiple times and in small sections to provide many repetitions of new material.

Prepare and utilize, as needed, supplementary rhythm and melodic sequencing.

For time and success of goals, may shorten activities to only 2 or 4 bars of the song, measures 1-4, rather than entire song, as shown in figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6 - To save time in rehearsal, activities may be shortened to only the first four measures, as shown here.

Violin

A la rorro niño

Mexican Folk Song

The image shows a musical score for the violin part of the Mexican folk song "A la rorro niño". The score is written in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The first four measures are highlighted with a red box. The lyrics are written below the notes, with two lines of lyrics provided for each measure. Performance instructions include "sul D" (sul ponticello) and "vibrato" markings. Fingering numbers (1, 2, 3) are indicated above the notes. The lyrics are: "A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya, A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro nou,". The second system of the score shows measures 5-8 with lyrics: "Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor. Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love." The score ends with a double bar line.

Adjust tempo of song as needed to accommodate abilities in the moment throughout lesson.

Instructional Materials, Resources and Technologies

Students need instruments: either violin, viola, cello, or bass, with their bow.

Handout of song sheet for *A la rorro niño* for each student written for their instrument,

Appendix A, figures A.5-A.8.

Rehearsal Plan

Table 2.2 - Eighth Grade Orchestra Rehearsal Plan

| Time | Activity | Purpose of Activity | Sequence | Assessment |
|--------|--|--|---|---|
| 5 min | Introduction/ Tuning | Prepare instruments for rehearsal by tuning all strings to match. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher relates pertinent information about upcoming required activities. • Use upper half of bow, play quietly, smoothly, and slowly with bow. • All students play A string while teacher moves through room to check. Do the same for all strings: D, G, C, E. | Throughout this time, teacher assess student set-up & posture by making adjustments while moving through room tuning instruments. |
| 5 min | Warm-ups | Prepare student readiness for technical practice on their instrument. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play 4 quarter notes with full bow on each string, starting with C string. • Play 4 quarter notes with full bow on each string alternating fingering of open string and 1st finger. • Play 4 quarter notes with full bow on each string playing open string, whole step, whole step, half step. Finger patterns: Violin/Viola 0, 1, High 2, 3; Cello 0, 1, 3, 4; Bass 0, 1, shift to 1, 2. | During warm-up teacher moves through room assessing student set-up and posture. |
| 10 min | <i>A la rorro niño</i> | Inform students of the song through melody, lyrics, and cultural context. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher will hand out the song page and sing song to students. • Explain meaning of lyrics while singing 2 measure chunks of the song at a time and having students repeat. • Explain cultural context. • Engage students through group question and answer about concept of lullaby and cultural use of the song in Mexico, both as a commonly used lullaby, and its ties to the Christian holiday of Christmas in which the song is used as a lullaby for Jesus. • Have class sing the song using Spanish lyrics. | <p>Informally assess students through whole-group question and answer during teacher lecture.</p> <p>Aurally assess whole class understanding of lyrics and melody while whole class sings.</p> |
| 5 min | Sight read <i>A la rorro niño</i> on instruments | Acquaint students to playing this melody on their instruments only using first position. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss rhythms present in song: eighth, quarter, and half notes. • Say rhythms of entire song as class. • Pizzicato 2 measure chunks (may skip this step). • Pizzicato entire song, in first position. | Teacher assesses by watching and listening to whole group participation. |

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| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play entire song with the bow, observe bow lifts. | |
| 5 min | Use shifting on D string to play <i>A la rorro niño</i> | Acquaint students with location of shifts within song and practice performing the shifts. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher introduces concept of <i>sul D</i>, meaning playing only on the D string. • Teacher introduces notation for shifting marked as a slanted line within fingerings. • Violins, Violas, and Basses only: Play first measure in 1st position, then repeat it, this time incorporating the shift to 1st finger G in 3rd position on D string. Teacher model first, play as a group, then independent practice while it is cellos turn. Prompt to students to check G with open G string. • Cellos only: Play first measure plus one note in 1st position, then repeat it, this time incorporating the shift to 1st finger A in 4th position on D string. Teacher model first, play as a group. • Everyone together play with shift first measure plus one note. Violins and violas will be adding 2nd finger A in 3rd position. Ask students if it is a whole step of half step. Basses will add 4th finger A in 3rd position. • Play first five notes again as a class and have students check A with open A string. • Continue with isolations of shifts combined with checking pitch of octaves of open strings throughout the rest of song. • Play in 4 measure chunks, incorporating all shifts as whole class. Then play entire song as whole class. | <p>Teacher assesses by watching and listening to whole group participation.</p> <p>Teacher prompt whole group question and answer.</p> |
| 5 min | Review preparatory movements for vibrato | Provide review of the sequence of movements designed to prepare left hand for implementing vibrato. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice finger flexibility with punching bags and trampolines. • Practice forearm movement with left arm swings. Violins/Violas: guitar position, thumb on neck, horizontal swing of forearm. Cello/Bass: playing position, thumb on neck, vertical swing of forearm. • Practice finger flexibility combined with left hand/arm mobility across fingerboard: Mountains/Plains activity. • Mountains/Plains on shoulder of instrument with fingertip planted. Then move to playing position, mountains/plains on string and play with the bow. Make the slides smaller | Teacher assesses by watching and listening to whole group performance. |

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|-------|--|--|--|--|
| | | | <p>and smaller until planting fingertip in one location.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhythmic mountains/plains with fingertip planted. Slow for 3 counts stretch joint into plain position and on 4th count snap the finger back to mountain position. Play and count these together as a class. Then change to 1 beat stretch and 1 beat snap back. • Independent vibrato practice while teacher moves around assessing and offering adjustments. | |
| 5 min | Use shifting and vibrato to perform <i>A la rorro niño</i> | Perform all of <i>A la rorro niño</i> utilizing the shifting that is marked on the song as well as vibrating the half notes. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play as a whole class, with teacher, first line of <i>A la rorro niño</i> as a class, incorporating all written shifts and vibrato on the half note. • Play as a whole class, without teacher, first line of <i>A la rorro niño</i>, incorporating all written shifts and vibrato on the half note. • Repeat with second line. • Repeat with entire song. | Teacher assesses by watching and listening to whole group performance. |
| 5 min | Closing | Finish lesson with pack-up and reminders. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind students to pack up instruments correctly (loosen bow, wipe strings and body with rag, pick up chairs & stands). • Wish students a wonderful day. | Teacher moves through room watching as students pick up, giving reminders as needed. |

Rehearsal Reflections

Through these lessons, my goal was to introduce a culturally diverse folk song to varied levels of string students, and utilize the melodic material in teaching or reinforcing technical performance skills. In both lessons, the students became familiar with the melodic structure and cultural context of the song *A la rorro niño*, a popular folk song in Mexican culture, often sung during celebrations of the Christian holiday, Christmas, as a lullaby to baby Jesus (Howard, 2020).

In the Fifth Grade Strings Lesson students also became familiar with the terms staccato and slur and their meanings. Using the song sheet handout, students also learned how to decode the visual representations of staccato and slur and then practiced performing the bowing skill. I

used the lecture style of instructional strategies blended with inquiry-based learning while presenting the new skills, with some opportunity for cooperative learning in pairs. Within the Eighth Grade Orchestra Lesson, I utilized the same instructional strategies while introducing and reinforcing the skills of shifting and vibrato. In both lessons all assessment was informal and either performance based or whole group question and answer format.

In the future I believe more rigorous assessment could strengthen this lesson structure. Adding an element of written work in which students write their own staccato, slur, or shifting notation on existing music would reinforce the decoding skills for these notations. I also think that incorporating a creation element could provide individual ownership of these skills and terms. In order to achieve this one option would be that students could write their own 4 bar phrase, utilizing known pitches and rhythms, that must incorporate the new skill. I also believe that choosing a different song that has a game or activity associated with it could engage students in a more action-based learning style when becoming acquainted with a new folk song. When a song is learned in an active style students can more quickly develop an internal knowledge of the melodic structure and meaning of the song.

As I review the video recording of these lessons, I find myself focused on a few major points. In general, I need to develop stronger assessment skills when teaching new concepts. With more assessment, formal or informal, comes more data to inform future lessons and enrich student learning. Secondly, I need to expand my instructional strategies on a daily basis. Rather than relying on lecture for the delivery of all new concepts I could include more kinesthetic and cooperative learning opportunities to broaden student understanding.

Chapter 3 - Reflections

Many years ago, as I was finishing my undergraduate degrees at Wichita State University, I stumbled upon the idea of *conscientização*, defined by Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as, “...learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (1993, p. 9). At that time, I had suddenly become aware that the societal structures I had taken for granted my entire life were actually precariously fragile. Unlike Freire’s definition, I felt unable to take action, even though I was motivated to begin building a post-oppression future. While completing my graduate courses at Kansas State University (KSU), I have been challenged through critical pedagogical strategies while receiving the support I needed to define tangible steps in creating the future I want to see within my classroom.

The assigned reading of Tammy Yi’s article *Social Justice and Ensemble Success: Implementing Alternative Seating Practices* (2019) has been a strong influence on my daily practice in teaching secondary string ensembles. I have just concluded my second year as an orchestral director and none of my ensembles are organized into ranked seating. I implemented this policy since my first day in the district and, luckily, have faced zero push-back from the stakeholders of my orchestras. I reorganize the seating in every section of the ensembles when beginning a new concert cycle. I also utilize Yi’s suggestions of scramble seating, circle seating, and randomization within our rehearsals. I believe that this practice has already demonstrated some of the benefits that Yi writes about. I have experienced many students taking ownership over the ensemble and their personal musicianship which I have observed via planning sectionals outside of the school day, increased individual practice time, and much more focused listening. This practice has sewn a sense of belonging and safety into the fabric of my ensembles.

Another influential assigned reading during this program was Carlos Abril's *Music That Represents Culture: Selecting Music with Integrity* (2006). Abril postulates that authentic representation of culturally diverse music will enrich student learning and technical achievements. This level of enrichment can only be achieved if both the melodic structure of the music is an accurate representation as well as the composer's or arranger's background supports their authority on the style or genre. I started this graduate program knowing that representing diverse voices was important to me, and, after reading this article and studying with Dr. Rachel Dirks, I have made it a goal in each of my ensembles to represent cultural diversity through at least one piece on every program that we perform. I have also utilized these guidelines to remove inauthentic representations of culturally diverse pieces from the orchestra's music library. A resource that I use regularly when researching new music to incorporate into my programs is a shared spreadsheet that I created with my colleagues as part of our symphonic literature studies. This invaluable spreadsheet is a living document that is designed to collect music that represents a broad spectrum of diverse demographics.

As the sole teacher of a fifth grade through twelfth grade strings program, I bring with me a passion for the physical set-up of students' instruments. I believe that a relaxed, focused, and natural set-up has an immeasurable impact on a student's ability to advance technically with comfort and joy, as well as minimize frustration or pain and injuries. In *Principles of Violin Playing & Teaching*, Galamian states that, "Naturalness should be [one's] first guiding principle. 'Right' is only what is natural for the particular student, for only what is natural is comfortable and efficient" (1985, p. 1), regarding each individual's approach to their instrument. During my graduate work at KSU, Dr. Cora Cooper taught Upper String Pedagogy and her approach validated this disposition towards natural comfort while playing a string instrument.

With every ensemble I make time to reevaluate all students' set-ups at the beginning of each year, and then revisit the concepts on a regular basis throughout the school year. I begin initial set-up with a posture check and a mental and physical relaxation activity. Then I have students find the natural spacing for their relaxed fingers on both hands by laying them palm up on their legs. Students will find that the fingers have a natural curve and the fingers are usually pretty evenly spaced. As students move forward in their set-ups, I encourage them to utilize their natural finger shape as a neutral starting position for both hands. For all of the instruments, I have students find their natural open arm position which will become the neutral starting position for holding and playing their instruments.

I have also grown artistically through my graduate studies. My deep dive into the idea of string technique has reawakened my love of being a performer and inspired a renewed interest in personal technical practice on the violin. In my current position I have found many personal performance opportunities which allow me to create art on my own terms, refilling my artistic well to share with my students. As for the art of conducting, it had been almost fifteen years since I had taken a conducting course and many of the concepts that we studied felt brand new. My ability to effectively direct my ensembles was bolstered through the practice of psychological conducting combined with relearning the basic skills such as: choosing and holding a baton, expressive gestures, phrasing, tempo changes, melding, developing the left hand, and fermatas, to name a few.

This graduate program has inspired me to look at teaching and programming as another extension of my musical artistry. I am learning to weave the concepts of thorough score study and pre-teaching strategies, well-organized program administration, and up-to-date educational research into the tapestry we create together as a thriving string program. I will continue to strive

to create the future I wish to see- a future beyond the oppression currently rampaging through our society. I will critically engage students while uplifting culturally diverse voices in the orchestra classroom. I will insist upon relaxed, comfortable set-ups while performing on string instruments. I will prioritize a sense of safety and belonging while maintaining the joy of making music.

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Appendix A - Song Sheet Handouts

Figure A.1 - Song Sheet Handout for Violin featuring *A la rorro niño* written as it comes with bow lifts as necessary, written with staccato notations, and written with slur notations.

Violin

A la rorro niño

Mexican Folk Song

The sheet music is presented in four systems, each with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a 2/4 time signature. The first system shows the melody with natural bowing, indicated by small square marks above the notes. The second system shows the melody with staccato bowing, indicated by dots above the notes. The third system shows the melody with slurred bowing, indicated by curved lines connecting the notes. The fourth system shows the melody with slurred bowing, indicated by curved lines connecting the notes.

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

5 Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Staccato: represented by dots above or below the notes.
Play by making the notes short by stopping the bow after playing each note.

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

5 Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Slur: represented by curved lines connecting 2 or more notes.
Play by pulling the bow in one continuous direction while playing different notes with the left hand.

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

5 Duér - me - te mi ni - no, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Figure A.2 - Song Sheet Handout for Viola featuring *A la rorro niño* written as it comes with bow lifts as necessary, written with staccato notations, and written with slur notations.

Viola

A la rorro niño

Mexican Folk Song

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Staccato: represented by dots above or below the notes.

Play by making the notes short by stopping the bow after playing each note.

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Slur: represented by curved lines connecting 2 or more notes.

Play by pulling the bow in one continuous direction while playing different notes with the left hand.

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

Duér - me - te mi ni - no, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Figure A.3 - Song Sheet Handout for Cello featuring *A la rorro niño* written as it comes with bow lifts as necessary, written with staccato notations, and written with slur notations.

Violoncello

A la rorro niño

Mexican Folk Song

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
 A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

5

Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
 Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Staccato: represented by dots above or below the notes.
 Play by making the notes short by stopping the bow after playing each note.

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
 A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

5

Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
 Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Slur: represented by curved lines connecting 2 or more notes.
 Play by pulling the bow in one continuous direction while playing different notes with the left hand.

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
 A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

5

Duér - me - te mi ni - no, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
 Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Figure A.4 - Song Sheet Handout for Bass featuring *A la rorro niño* written as it comes with bow lifts as necessary, written with staccato notations, and written with slur notations.

Contrabass

A la rorro niño

Mexican Folk Song

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
 A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
 Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Staccato: represented by dots above or below the notes.
 Play by making the notes short by stopping the bow after playing each note.

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
 A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
 Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Slur: represented by curved lines connecting 2 or more notes.
 Play by pulling the bow in one continuous direction while playing different notes with the left hand.

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
 A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

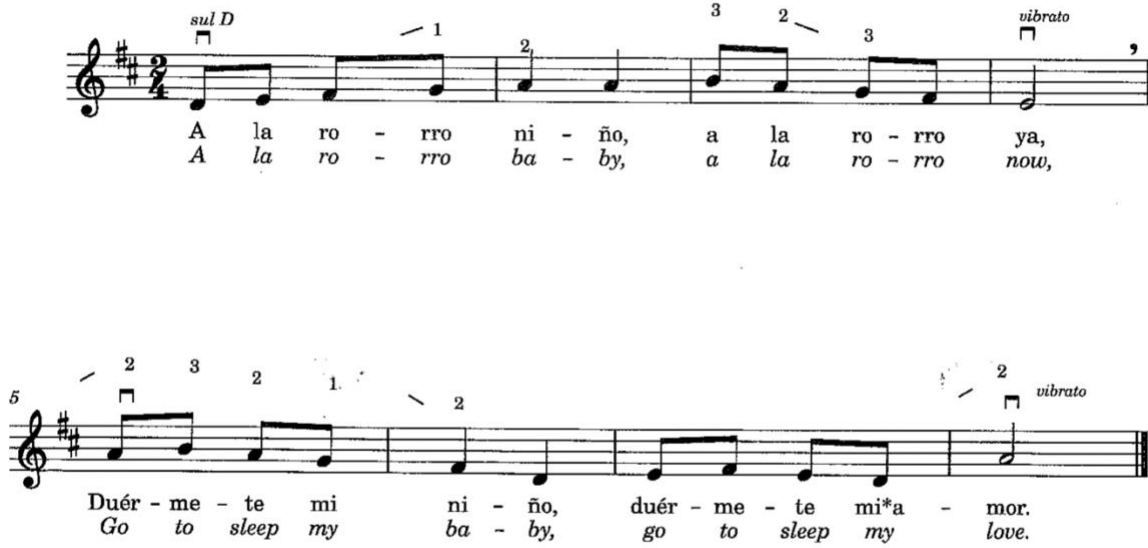
Duér - me - te mi ni - no, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
 Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Figure A.5 - Song Sheet Handout for Violin featuring *A la rorro niño* written *sul D* string with shifting fingerings and notations, plus suggested vibrato on half notes.

Violin

A la rorro niño

Mexican Folk Song



^{*sul D*}
 A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
 A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

5
 Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
 Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Figure A.6 - Song Sheet Handout for Viola featuring *A la rorro niño* written *sul D* string with shifting fingerings and notations, plus suggested vibrato on half notes.

Viola A la rorro niño

Mexican Folk Song

sul D 1 2 3 2 3 vibrato

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

2 3 2 1 2 vibrato

Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi* a - mor.
Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Figure A.7 - Song Sheet Handout for Cello featuring *A la rorro niño* written *sul D* string with shifting fingerings and notations, plus suggested vibrato on half notes.

Violoncello

A la rorro niño

Mexican Folk Song

sul D \square 1 3 1 4 \square vibrato

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

5 1 3 1 4 \square vibrato

Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.

Figure A.8 - Song Sheet Handout for Bass featuring *A la rorro niño* written *sul D* string with shifting fingerings and notations, plus suggested vibrato on half notes.

Contrabass

A la rorro niño

Mexican Folk Song

sul D \square 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 *vibrato*

A la ro - rro ni - ño, a la ro - rro ya,
 A la ro - rro ba - by, a la ro - rro now,

6 1 4 1 4 1 0 1 4 1 0 \square *vibrato*

Duér - me - te mi ni - ño, duér - me - te mi*a - mor.
 Go to sleep my ba - by, go to sleep my love.