

Starting from the End: A Proposal of Curriculum Guidelines for Beginning Cellists

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## **ABSTRACT**

Traditional cello pedagogy for beginning students has remained largely unchanged since around the mid-1900s. The traditional curriculum for these students is usually based on the content of books and note reading only. However, this approach may be harmful since it leaves behind detailed basic technique. Also, it does not prepare the student for the advanced level because traditional pedagogical philosophy limits technical contents at the beginning level, avoiding some techniques such as shifting and out-of-the-string bow strokes.

This research is a proposal of guidelines for a curriculum for beginning cellists based on sequences of skill development. An analysis of the cello pedagogies of Margaret Rowell, Phyllis Young, and Irene Sharp provides a foundation for a beginning cello curriculum based on kinesthetic, visual, and aural approaches for the student.

Each one of these master cello teachers provided a series of instruction sequences for cello students based on the advanced technique. Differently from the traditional books, these non-traditional pedagogies defined their curriculum beginning with some skills traditionally considered advanced. The curriculum guidelines will be illustrated by eight instruction sequences for beginning cellists, such as the development of shifting skills, bounced bow strokes, and the exploration of the cello fingerboard mapping.

These sequences are crucial in developing an ideal approach for beginning cellists that provides an earlier preparedness for the advanced level. In addition, the sequences will develop a more reliable basic technique that nurtures body awareness and aural skills instead of focusing on note reading only. In addition, the purpose of the curriculum guidelines is to offer a holistic approach to cello students by delivering instructions from visual, kinesthetic, and aural perspectives. As a result, the prevention of injuries is a major element of these sequences since body awareness is developed as part of the curriculum. Lastly, the note reading is seen as one of the required skills but

it needs to be developed in a 'safe zone,' where the cello student plays technical content below their beginning level to avoid the risk of developing bad habits.

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## CHAPTER I

### I. INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this document is the proposal of curriculum guidelines by providing eight sequences of cello skills for beginning cellists. The reason for this study is the need for an optimized learning sequence for cello teaching in various venues in the USA, such as public schools and private music schools. Rowell, Sharp, and Young argue that the advanced cello technique content is a major reference for an ideal curriculum for beginning students. According to them, there are gaps in the education of cellists because of the lack of the preparedness for the attainment of an advanced technique. For this reason, an advanced-technique-oriented-approach should be the philosophy of every cellist's education since their first lesson, and not only learned and applied when they achieve an advanced level.

While teaching beginning students, a cello teacher has the opportunity to shape their basic technique and nurture their musical understanding throughout the learning process. In this situation the teacher has a responsibility over the future of their students' educations and careers. The cello teacher can either 'bless' or 'curse' their students depending on the quality of their teaching approach. If the teacher follows a curriculum based on note reading only and does not pay attention to the acquisition of skills by their students, the result will be the development of many bad habits, that will result in poor performances. Concurrent with the note reading oriented process, there is the legacy of the traditional cello books as a curriculum. These books can work well

by providing a good sequencing of technical contents for cello students who are immersed in a Western classical music culture and have the habit of regularly attending cellists' performances. Within this musical environment, the missing details in the traditional books' curriculum can be easily solved due to the exposure of the cello student to a musically rich environment. But if we consider a public-school student from a family without access to Western classical music, the cello book is far from sufficient for a first semester curriculum. Also, the traditional cello books are based on specific technique or content. For example, a cello book for beginnings, such as *Dotzauer Volume One*,<sup>1</sup> does not contain any shifting or playing with harmonics because it was considered advanced technique by the author. In addition, they do not give many details about how to engage your body as part of the skill acquisition process. In other words, cello books do not provide instructions about body awareness and injury prevention.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, a teaching-by-skills approach for beginning cellists can reach most of the students, regardless of their musical backgrounds. This proposed pedagogy based on the master teachers includes an imagery, aural, and kinesthetic approach to cello playing. Using daily tasks of our human life to teach cello technique could be productive since everything would make sense to the student. From solely using traditional books there are only musical notes and a couple of cello technique directions about how to play a specific task. Just to exemplify the downside of books,

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<sup>1</sup> J. J. F. Dotzauer, *Dotzauer Violoncello Method* (New York: Fischer, 1917).

<sup>2</sup> Marianne Murray Perkins, *A Comparative Study of the Violin Playing Techniques Developed by Kato Havas, Paul Rolland, and Shinichi Suzuki* (1993).

how would a saxophone player (who teaches the cello) be able to properly teach beginning cello students by following a book page by page? There is not enough information in the cello book about cello technique. It means that this non-cello playing instructor may have issues with teaching essential cello skills such as good posture, proper bow hold, and bow placement unless the individual looks for a cello instruction training course. By following a note-reading curriculum, the details will be missed, and the basic cello technique will be poorly developed in the beginning student. Additionally, most of the current cello instructors who play the cello as their primary instrument received traditional training while they were beginning students.

Another characteristic of the traditional books is the requirement of musical talent in beginning students. Just to clarify, this requirement could be very subjective since musical talent is actually a combination of skills. For centuries, string teachers expected some previous musical abilities such as aural skills in their students because they did not want to waste anyone's time by teaching someone who (according to their belief) could not learn the cello. All this traditional philosophy led to teachers failing their students, and the blaming of all the teacher's lack of success on their 'untalented' students. A non-traditional string pedagogy does not judge students based on their background but provides an intelligent approach to the cello learning process. It means that a successful curriculum is based on an excellent teacher's pedagogy and pedagogical strategies instead of books only. This argument illustrates the purpose of this study since it is all about 'what, when, and how' to teach some specific cello skills to beginning students by following sequences of instructions instead of a book only.

Firstly, the content of traditional books is limited to what their authors classified as content for beginning cellists. The definition of traditional books is not a simple task since they were developed randomly throughout the earlier half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by diverse pedagogues. According to Lee (2007), “It is difficult to define the traditional string method, as it is not the work of a single person but is rather a compilation of many ideas on teaching strings.”<sup>3</sup> For example, the beginning cello techniques in these books, such as Dotzauer’s, mainly includes first position, *detachè* bow stroke, and left-hand extensions (back and forward). Besides the limited content of these books, it is presented by note reading only. This fact puts the note reading as a primary skill instead of the basic technique such as a balanced posture and instrument position, or an aligned left-hand placement on the fingerboard. Besides the lack of a detailed basic technique, the limited content may cause lack of preparedness for the advanced level. For example, the large amount of time expended by playing on the first position (usually, more than one year) could be an obstacle for the cello students when they start learning shifting to other positions because they have not been developing vertical movements on their left-hand in the beginning level. According to one of the master cello teachers, Irene Sharp, the awareness of the whole cello fingerboard is a must from the very first lesson.<sup>4</sup> Actually, Rowell, Sharp and Young include the whole extension of the fingerboard as part of their instruction sequences to teach the left-hand placement to beginnings. Also, they keep exploring the whole

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<sup>3</sup> Angela Lee, *Two Non-Traditional Cello Methods for Young Beginning Cello Students: A Mixed Methods Study* (University of Southern California: PhD dissertation, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Irene Sharp, *The Art of Teaching Cello DVD* (Palo Alto, California: Ames Studio, 2003).

fingerboard as a unit by adding new steps to their sequences of instruction. Another example of ‘what and when’ to teach beginning cellists is the right-hand technique. The teaching of *detaché* as the only bow stroke could limit the understanding of a rich sound production on the cello because it is hard to listen to the resonance of the strings while playing long and continuous bowings.

Learning out-of-the-string bow strokes helps students to gain more right-hand skills because this technique gives more awareness of the amount of relaxation on the bow hand. In addition, starting the right-hand technique by playing short bow strokes makes it is rather easy to listen to the resonance instead of long-note bowings.

Margaret Rowell preferred to introduce a series of rhythmic figures such as a multiple combination of eighth and sixteenth notes, and the very first bow stroke is the martelé instead of the *detaché* because it is ‘short and firm.’<sup>5</sup> In addition to these rhythmic practicing, she cared about the tone and the resonance of her students’ playing instead of spending time by playing dozens of exercises from a book. Lastly, in the traditional cello books’ contents the forward extension is presented without a proper preparation. For example, Dotzauer Violoncello Method Volume 1 presents the forward extension in the exercise No. 65 with one instruction only: “Long stretch, major third. The thumb moves a semitone higher.”<sup>6</sup> This book presents this technical content without any technical content preparing required left-hand skill such as open-hand. Thus, it is a left-hand technique that can be harmful if it is not taught properly, especially to small

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Rolland, *Prelude to String Playing: Basic Materials and Motion Techniques for Individual or Class Instruction* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Dotzauer, 1917.

handed cello students. The forward extension is avoided in the non-traditional cello pedagogy at the beginning level because it can cause unnecessary left-hand tension and injury to cellists. To summarize, the non-traditional cello pedagogy curriculum includes components of the advanced technique but avoids some beginning ones (according to the books) such as forward extension while teaching beginning students. Also, the ‘how’ to teach is not based on the sequence of a book but on the presentation of layers of cello skills that will be developed according to each student’s technique level.

A common component in the approach of each one of the master cello teachers is teaching in sequences. For example, on Sharp’s DVD we can watch the master teacher working with a beginning cellist from the very first lesson until the completion of eight months of private lessons.<sup>7</sup> Mrs. Sharp’s approach is based on the separation of cello skills and their presentation into layers of abilities. For example, to teach a three-octave scale to the beginning student, Sharp presents the game ‘sirens’ in advance, at the first three lessons. This game enhances one of the required skills for shifting on the cello fingerboard, the glissando. Later, Mrs. Sharp includes the one-finger scale to teach the student how to move their left-arm going up and down in whole and half steps. Lastly, the student learns the fingerboard mapping for each one of these shiftings and is ready to play a three-octave scale. It is important to clarify that each of the layers of cello skills demands a time for maturation (i.e. individual practice and repetitions). The main point is the structure of the sequencing and how

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<sup>7</sup> Sharp, 2003.

easily each of these sets of instructions guides the cello student. Independent from the background of the teacher, the sequencing of their teaching is crucial to their students' success.

One example is the orchestra teacher position that is filled by band teachers because the job offers for band are quickly filled and they have to apply for orchestra instead.<sup>8</sup> Even these non-string players can provide a very good instruction for cello students if they follow a curriculum based on sequences of skills. However, most of these teachers are still teaching by note reading only instead of teaching by skills. The result of these two facts, the non-cellist teacher and the note-reading pedagogy, is the mass production of cellists lacking fundamental technique skills, which may cause issues in their future as advanced cellists. The solution is the application of non-traditional cello pedagogy components to their curriculum. This curriculum would provide an ideal approach to the beginning cellist based on a kinesthetic, auditive, and visual approach to the technique. Also, learning the cello by rote learning (instead of note reading only) can lead the student to the development of aural and analytical skills such as identification of patterns, rhythm precision, clear tone, and accurate intonation.

The rote learning process allows a better comprehension of the music language through the cello. It permits that the student enhances his reading skills in the future because it avoids confusion with written music and the understanding of its patterns

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<sup>8</sup> Melissa May Newbrey, *An Examination of the Issues of Non-string Teachers Teaching Strings* (2008).

such as moving by steps (diatonic scales), skips (broken thirds, arpeggios), etc.<sup>9</sup> For example, to acquire a new language, you have to learn its vocabulary, the meaning of each word, and make up sentences as well, and the same happens in the acquisition of the musical language. Only after getting an initial fluency in the musical language is the individual ready to start note reading. For this reason, the learning process needs to start with the exposition to the language by hearing, repeating, and understanding its meaning and patterns. Later, the reading skills will happen easily because each one music figure represents a well-known and meaningful sound.

But to avoid the development of bad habits and to prevent injuries, the technical content of the reading exercises has to be lower than the beginning student level. Otherwise, if the individual starts the process backwards (note reading first), they can find obstacles because their primary concern will be on understanding the written musical language instead of, for example, the sound quality or intonation. Also, the beginning student will be concerned about finding the location of the notes on their cello fingerboard only and will not develop a more detailed basic technique. Non-traditional pedagogy prioritizes the development of the basic technique as a foundation by reviewing skills and reinforcing them by starting the sequential teaching from the first layer of abilities. For example, if the student is learning one-finger scale, the teacher will review the introductory warmup for shifting because this is a basic skill for the task. For this reason, the purpose of this study is the proposal of

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<sup>9</sup> Radio Cremata, *The Effects of Rote and Note Teaching on the Performance of High School Chorus* (Florida International University: Master's thesis, 2003).

curriculum guidelines illustrated with eight sequences of cello skills for very beginning cellists. These sequences will include examples of warmups, technical exercises, repertoire, and scales. To summarize, it is a proposed curriculum based on three non-traditional pedagogues' approaches, that would be more accommodating to cello students because of its holistic approach.

## II. TRADITIONAL CELLO BOOKS

The label 'traditional methods' is attributed to all those books, mostly European, which originated from the 17th to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and they were the only resource for curriculum and instruction. In the same context, the instruments made by skilled luthiers, and the master pieces composed by great composers, were performed by talented musicians, and this fruitful environment influenced the start of formalized cello pedagogy. The pedagogues were trying to figure out where to start teaching beginning students while defining the first basic skills and how to teach them. The traditional methods, including Dotzauer, Lee, and Feullard, were the result of all those cello-technique-mastering-struggles translated into 'beginning cello scores.' Also, some of those cello pedagogues wrote technical books inspired by the piano technique books or wrote adaptations from violin books such as the Sevcik opus 8. To summarize, the main goal of the first cello pedagogues was to prepare their student for playing all those masterpieces on those fine instruments with limited pedagogical resources.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Lee, 2007.

In general, the practice session with traditional books results in hours of reading skills, but without any focus on body awareness or aural skills. It is all about playing the notes in the book only. The traditional books' contents for beginnings are based on technical exercises and unknown melodies to master a specific range of the cello fingerboard – the first position. A beginning cellist's big concern would be how to read the notes on their book and how to locate those series of notes on their cello fingerboard. The pedagogical approach is not concerned with 'how' to do that. For example, in terms of the fundamentals of the technique, the cello position and the bow hold are taught once, usually in the very first lesson only. The student is expected to be ready to start playing just after building their first bow hold, and after adjusting the height of the cello endpin. The tone production is limited to the pitch of the note only, no attention is paid to its quality and resonance (unless a specific teacher asks). Last, listening to recordings was not encouraged by most of the traditional teachers because they preferred their own playing as the only source of performance as reference to their students' ears. The result of all this traditional teaching was lack of development of body awareness, aural skills, and essential basic technique, as well as an absence of listening to different interpretations of repertoire, leading the cellist to lots of needs in their path as a musician. The result can be painful while solving all these fundamental technical issues while playing intermediate or advanced repertoire.<sup>11</sup>

As stated before, the main goal of the cello pedagogy before the mid-1900s was to build musicians ready to play the standard repertoire. It meant to cut off those

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<sup>11</sup> Lee, 2007.

students who did not meet the talent standards or even the physical requirements stated by the teachers of that time. This fact illustrates the philosophy of the traditional cello books that if the student did not meet the minimum requirements of musical talent or a specific body type, they would be labeled as undesirable students.<sup>12</sup>

The curriculum of the cello books for beginnings was limited to the first position only. This aspect of the traditional books' curriculum was probably based on the violin and piano pedagogy that could lead the cello pedagogues to some questions such as: Where do the notes 'start on the cello fingerboard?' or Where is the 'middle C' of the cello? It is a common sense that open string is a safe first step to start developing cello technique because they are in tune – at least they are supposed to be tuned before every practice session. What comes after the open strings? What is the second step in the teaching sequencing? Here the problem starts because the traditional string pedagogy would follow the musical alphabet sequencing of notes – 'after A it is B and so on.' But for the cello technique, this sequence requires playing on the first position, and this position is not a safe spot to start point (first step) neither to stay for a long time. Playing on the first position only for six months or more can be harmful to the development of injury prevention and for the development of an advanced cello technique.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lee, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Ignacy Gaydamovich Grzelazka, *Beyond the Octave: A New Cello Method for Advanced Students: Mapping the Fingerboard, Thumb Position Exercises, and a New Approach to Shifting* (2016).

To summarize, the traditional books have their legacy and are an enormous contribution to the cello pedagogy. These books were a reference for cello teachers by providing curriculum and sequence of skills. Lastly, all these books have a register of the history of the cello playing and teaching across the centuries. Besides the standard cello repertoire, which is timeless, the pedagogy needs evolution and adaptation to the students' needs. For this reason, cello instructors have the mission to allow new students to access the art of cello playing by providing an optimized approach.

Cello teaching should be comprehensive, free of judgement, and cautious to avoid bad habits. Instead of just overshadowing the basics of the cello technique such as bow hold, instrument position, and bow and left-hand placement to start the note reading process with books, the teacher should start with concepts. One major component of this curriculum is the focus on the cello student and their playing instead of note reading only. Tone is another major component. The concept of a beautiful tone must be one of the priorities of cello teaching for beginning students. This concept opposes the belief that a beautiful tone only comes along with a more advanced level. The present study's main goal is to propose a successful curriculum for beginning cellists that would cover those gaps present in the traditional books. In reality, if a beginning student spends most of their time with note reading instead of understanding how to play the cello efficiently, the result can be disastrous.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Pamela Davenport, *Cello Start: Essential Topics of Cello Pedagogy* (Asheville, NC: United Writers Press, 2014).

## CHAPTER II

### I. MARGARET ROWELL, IRENE SHARP, AND PHYLLIS YOUNG

Margaret Avery Rowell was from Redlands, California. She was born in 1900 and died in 1982. After graduating from Berkeley and getting married to Professor Edward Rowell, she started giving cello lessons at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. After that, Dr. Margaret Rowell started giving lessons at universities as well. Rowell became a renowned cellist and after a severe illness three-year condition she had to stop her performer career and dedicated the following years to the development of her own cello pedagogy. While reteaching herself how to play advanced cello technique, Rowell developed a whole-body-approach pedagogy and provided a reliable basis for her students as full human beings. Her most famous quote is: “I can’t teach the cello, because it doesn’t learn, I teach the human being!”<sup>15</sup> Dr. Rowell revolutionized the cello teaching process by giving her students different ways to approach the art of the cello playing with sequences of instructions that herself practiced for over fifty years. She was so influential that great cellists went to California to learn about her pedagogical ideas, including Pablo Casals, Rostropovich, and Starker. Rowell left a long-lasting legacy in cello pedagogy after traveling extensively around the world and giving teacher training, and workshops for cellists. Between her contributions to cello pedagogy is the book ‘Prelude to String Playing’

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<sup>15</sup> Diana Kehlmann, “Margaret Rowell, Cello Teacher.” Berkeley Historical Plaque Project. <https://berkeleyplaques.org/e-plaque/margaret-rowell/> (accessed September 2020).

that she wrote as a co-author along with Paul Rolland, and an instructional video with the same title where Rowell shares her own pedagogy.<sup>16</sup>

Phyllis Young was from Milan, Kansas. She was born in 1925 and died in 2017. She got her bachelor and master's degrees in cello performance at the University of Texas and became professor at the same university. Before becoming a full cello professor and director of the UT String Project, she studied in France and Italy. In addition to her career at UT Austin, Mrs. Young taught extensively in her private studio. Some of her former cello students are now in major orchestras and universities in the USA, and in other countries. In addition to her role as a cello teacher, she served as the ASTA president from 1978 to 1982. Also, she was awarded multiple times for her exceptional contributions to cello pedagogy. These included the books 'Playing the String Game' and the 'String Play.'

Irene Sharp was born in Germany. While attending Berkeley in California, Sharp became a cello student of Margaret Rowell and the two went on to become partners in the cello pedagogy field. Sharp worked as an artist teacher in Europe for 10 years where she presented her cello pedagogy work, including her students' recitals. After an intense [add time] experience as a cello teacher in Detroit and Pittsburgh, Sharp became the cello professor at the San Francisco State University.

She taught in various summer institutes, including the Meadowmount School for Strings. One of her major contribution to cello pedagogy is the DVD called 'The

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<sup>16</sup> Margaret Rowell, *Instructional video for cello*. [DVD]. San Francisco, CA, 1980.

Art of Teaching Cello' where she teaches a four-year-old girl from the very first lesson until the completion of eight months of instruction.

## II. THE THREE APPROACHES

The three cello pedagogues cited in this study are not Suzuki teachers, but all of them have served as deep inspiration to the Suzuki cello school. These pedagogues were chosen by the author because their pedagogies are non-traditional and contain pedagogical ideas purely based on the cello technique, and due to personal interest in this field as well. Since there are many influences of the violin pedagogy applied to the Suzuki cello school, and some of these adaptations are not a good fit, the author considered these master teachers as the most authentic representatives of the non-traditional pedagogy for the instrument.

As one of the most important non-traditional methods, the Suzuki method advocates the teaching of children younger than previously thought possible, starting at 2 or 3 years old. This methodology has brought a lot of contributions to the string's pedagogy in general. Based on the quote 'Every Child Can', this methodology nurtured lots of teaching strategies that fit all types of students, even those without a previous classical musical environment. These teaching strategies are built on the concept that everything you teach can be fragmented and presented in an intelligent sequence, in a way that anyone can learn.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Lee, 2007.

One of the best contributions left behind by Rowell, Sharp, and Young is an innovative cello pedagogy for basic technique. For example, Rowell developed a unique approach to the cello pedagogy based on her study of natural body movements while playing. Sharp utilizes imagery language, and Young used analogies of regular tasks of our daily life while introducing concepts of cello skills. There are some similarities between their approaches as well such as injury prevention and the pedagogical sequences for a more advanced cello technique. All their non-traditional pedagogy contributed to a more reliable development of the basic skills and the early development of advanced skills in beginning cellists.

The use of kinesthetic and imagery analogies is a strong characteristic of Rowell's pedagogy.<sup>18</sup> One example is the 'baby grip' that is explained by Mrs. Martha Vallon on the 'Cello Circle' YouTube video. The 'baby grip' is used as a kinesthetic reference because it is easy to imitate little children's hand grip and its sensation. A baby has a strong grip already and can pull an adult finger firmly without squeezing. In the same way, Rowell argued that our fingers should have the same power on the strings without having to use tense hand or finger muscles because the main strength comes through the arm as 'an electrical cord.'<sup>19</sup> As stated by Martha Vallon, the feeling of the grip should be something 'between strength and floppiness.'

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<sup>18</sup> Irene Sharp, *Margaret Rowel's Teaching* (Palo Alto, California, 1984).

<sup>19</sup> "Cello Circle with Martha Vallon (Topic: Margaret Rowell)" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TXrOPGwdvPY> (accessed October 2020).

Mrs. Phyllis Young in her book 'Playing the String Game: Strategies for Teaching Cello and Strings' gave pedagogical guidance to the cello teacher by using a sequence of instructions. In this book, Mrs. Young calls these sequences 'games' instead of the traditional 'exercises.' She argues that during the beginning of the cello learning, the student should feel free to experiment with movements related to the cello technique and should not be afraid about cello playing because they can learn a lot about new skills even without the instrument.<sup>20</sup> She collected 165 games for her book and indicated that these should be used with songs or another method with melodies.<sup>21</sup> Young's cello pedagogy is based on analogies to simple tasks such as riding a horse or putting your hand inside a bucket full of water to explain how to 'feel' while learning a new skill on the instrument. Her use of imagery and kinesthetic analogies was a priority in her teaching approach.

Among the biggest challenges for a successful cello pedagogy is the sequence of instructions and how to communicate effectively with students. Even for a teacher who knows what to teach and what to expect from their student, sequence and communication are not simple tasks. Knowing what to teach step by step and giving directions that will make sense to the student requires a lot of thinking if the teacher only has a book and its content for a cello lesson. To better communicate to her students, Mrs. Phyllis Young presented daily life examples (imagery and/or

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<sup>20</sup> Sun-Ah Lee, *Methods and Techniques of Teaching First Semester Cello Performance Majors: Four Approaches by Four Master Teachers* (Ross Harbaugh, Phyllis Young, Irene Sharp, Tanya Carey), 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Phyllis Young, *Playing the String Game: Strategies for Teaching Cello and Strings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978).

kinesthetic) to introduce a concept or skills to her cello students. One of her imagery examples is the ‘Elegant Horseback Rider’ (figure 1).



Figure 1: Elegant Horseback Rider<sup>22</sup>

This example shows an image of a man sitting on a horse (on a cello practice stool), leaning his body forward, and with his legs around the horse’s ribs – that represents the cello position and the body balance while playing. This imagery approach to the playing position engages the cello student to sit properly, and keep their eyes looking up ready to play.

The successful cello pedagogy of Mrs. Young is based on her approach to the efficiency of body movements related to the cello playing skills. This approach is

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<sup>22</sup> Young, 1978.

similar to Margaret Rowell's teaching since both of them are aimed at the balance of the limbs in accordance with the center of gravity of the cello and focus of energy to avoid injuries.<sup>23</sup> It means that cello playing is a single unit and not a bunch of segregated movements (e.g, fingers only) that is very common on the traditional books.<sup>24</sup> According to Mrs. Young, both of the cellist's hand must have the same shape (curved and separated fingers), with different functionalities. This is all about thinking the cellist's body as a connected system instead of disconnected limbs movements.

Cello students seem susceptible to the development of bad habits at the beginning level because of the lack of reference about how to 'feel' while playing the instrument. This is a systemic problem due to the overall traditional approach. Beginning students usually are focusing on playing the right notes only instead of learning about body awareness or quality of sound production. For this reason, Mrs. Phyllis Young has written broadly about the art of cello teaching based on skills development. All her research and findings are in her books "The String Game" and "The String Play."<sup>25</sup> These books contain very interesting imagery-based approaches to the cello technique that can be applied from beginning to advanced level cellists. For this document, Young's cello pedagogy is a major reference because it teaches the same concepts that apply to very advanced cellist to the beginning level as well.

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<sup>23</sup> Rowell, *Instructional video for cello*. [DVD]. San Francisco, CA, 1980.

<sup>24</sup> Lee, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Young, 1978.

For Young, the time spent on cello instruction was mostly focused on the student's needs and not in etudes performance. She asked her student to record their etudes as a learning and assess tool. The recording session was a very useful learning and assess tool for her cello pedagogy. By recording himself, the student is forced to oversee his playing from a different perspective. The recording session would cause a self-evaluation. The habit of multiple recordings in a learning process creates a loop as students' practice, record, watch, write down the issues and their causes, and practice again.

Young's cello students had the opportunity to observe their peers in group lessons, solo recitals, and masterclasses. The reason for these experiences was so that her cello students could visualize their future as musicians while observing advanced cellists. This is a 'down to earth' approach to the cello learning process because of observing higher level cellists and learn how they practice will teach the importance of a successful practice session. In sum, the beginning cellist visualized himself playing in a higher level and realized the amount of effort they should have to become an advanced player.

Besides the whole set up of posture, instrument position, bow hold, and placement of both hands, another priority for Mrs. Young is the cello tone. The development of a resonant tone should happen from the very first lesson. In the traditional methodology, a beautiful tone is not a priority for beginning students because it is considered an advanced technique. Commonly, lots of string players never accomplish this 'advanced tone' because it was never a priority for them. But if

it is presented as a priority for beginnings, the learning process will be more successful. As a priority, the beginning student will be encouraged to think how to produce a clean and resonating tone, even when he is playing an open string pizzicato.

Instead of teaching only first position scale for young children, Mrs. Sharp engages the little ones to learn a bigger range of the cello fingerboard. She argues that playing scales can be unsatisfying if the cello student just practices the same ones repeatedly.<sup>26</sup> Mrs. Sharp's pedagogy includes the teaching of scales and arpeggios by rote learning. Her goal is to give a 'left-hand vocabulary' to her students and enhance their understanding of the cello fingerboard mapping instead of note reading each scale and arpeggio and approaching them as a cello etude only. To expand the scale practice, Mrs. Sharp teaches the one-finger scale on one string. This way the student learns shifting by leading the movement from the left elbow instead of wrist or finger movement. Also, Mrs. Sharp uses tapes on her students' cellos to give them a visual reference of where the notes are. While watching her DVD<sup>27</sup>, it is very clear that her 4 years old student is playing the one-finger scale orientated by her eyes because there are tapes across the cello fingerboard. This same four-year-old child was able to play a three-octave scale after eight months of cello lessons. According to the ASTA Certificate Program for Strings, playing a three-octave scale is a performance exam requirement only for level 4.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Lee, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> Sharp, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> ASTA, *Certificate Program for Strings, Handbook* (May 9, 2017).

There are three major components on Irene Sharp's lesson routine: she always plays on the student's cello to model the sound, video recording of demonstration during the lesson to be used as reference for home practice, and cello books for note reading.<sup>29</sup> Differently from the Suzuki method, Sharp requires reading skills at the first month of instruction and models the student sound by playing their small cellos instead of using professional recordings and her cello. This makes sense when the cello student needs a 'real reference' of what sound he is capable of.

Irene Sharp does not emphasize the repertoire review neither the homogeneous playing in groups lessons. Instead, she emphasizes the new repertoire learning by note reading and the performance of pieces with piano accompaniment. The opportunity to regularly play a solo piece with piano accompaniment for an audience is an essential component on the musicianship development. According to Sharp's approach, this can be experienced at the beginning level already.

About the review of known pieces to enhance the basic skills, Sharp stated that she is "not looking for perfection."<sup>30</sup> Instead her goal is to expose children to many different types of pieces and to teach different concepts through the use of a variety of repertoire. This specific approach can be a good fit while teaching very talented children with engaged parents because it would be very boring to review a known piece that was mastered easily. However, teaching regular students requires a more time for polishing the repertoire and to enhance the learned technique. Also, the

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<sup>29</sup> Sun-Ah Lee, *Methods and Techniques of Teaching*, 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Sharp, 2003.

review of memorized pieces works as a tool to introduce new musical concepts and cello skills. For example, by reviewing the piece 'French Folk Song', the student can learn how to play it in a lower octave, or by using a different finger pattern according to the new key stated by the teacher. The reason for the review of learned pieces is to help confidence about what the student learned and about the new information because he already 'played it before.'

The prevention of injuries is not a major component of the traditional cello books. Usually, the books are limited to model the bow hold, bow and left-hand placement, and the posture only. The solution to this problem would be the use of regular warmups and the use of a check list of injury prevention for each task. Due to the series of imagery and kinesthetic tools used on her warmups, Sharp easily helps her students to prevent bad posture and injuries. This approach was one of the major components of Margaret Rowell's pedagogy. Irene Sharp learned it from her while being her student at an adult age and with lot of technical but was able to overcome self-created obstacles in her cello playing.

Teaching the cello fingerboard as an interconnect fingerboard mapping is another major point of the non-traditional cello pedagogy. Traditionally, the learning of the fingerboard mapping is based on various positions that are determined by the first finger placement. The traditional curriculum for beginning presents only notes on the first position. The shifting to the fourth position comes only after a couple of months (depending on how fast the student learns). This approach limits the student's left-hand movement by not allowing it to move vertically. This lack of freedom may

create obstacles to their left-hand because they are playing with their fingers only most of the time, on the first position only. This limited practice led to the development of bad habits such as lowering the left-elbow and uneven placement of their fingers. On another hand, Dr. Rowell introduced the left-hand placement with sequencing of games such as ‘knock-knuckles’ and ‘ski jumps.’ Later, she would teach the one-finger scale for establishment of an invisible “cello keyboard.” This scale is successful because the cello student learns shifting with big muscles usage instead of moving individual fingers or the left wrist. While practicing the one-finger scale, the cello student will have to engage his left elbow and forearm on leading each shifting. Once the cellist has mastered the shifting with the practice of the one-finger scale, the next step will be to use a trichords in each position, within a minor or major third of range. Besides the shifting skill, the student has to learn the minor and major trichords that fits in each of these different positions. For example, if the student plays 1-2-4 (B-C-D) on the A-string first position and shifts to the second position, he is supposed to understand that he is now playing a half-step higher (C-C#-D#). In other words, he is still playing the same trichord but in a different key.

After learning a proper left-hand placement, its vertical movement, and the trichords, the cello student is ready to play scales and arpeggios with shifting. The fingering system for scales and arpeggios by Irene Sharp is inspired on the Galamian Scales book.<sup>31</sup> She requires that her students practice scales every day and reinforce

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<sup>31</sup> Sun-Ah Lee, *Methods and Techniques of Teaching*, 2005.

the accuracy of their intonation by checking same pitch notes with open strings and natural harmonics.

This analyzes is crucial to the establishment of curriculum guidelines for beginning cellists. The components of these three major non-traditional pedagogies would be applied as the base for the eight sequence of instructions that will illustrate the guidelines for beginning cellists' instruction.

### CHAPTER III

#### I. GUIDELINES FOR A CURRICULUM PROPOSAL

The purpose of this chapter is introducing the components for a fundamental cello pedagogy for beginning students illustrated by eight sequences for a skill-oriented curriculum. All these guidelines and sequences are based on three non-traditional cello pedagogues. Usually, non-traditional methods have three ways to teach music for beginning cellists: rote learning, playing by ear, and sight-reading music (below the student's technical level).

Rote learning is built on four components: the listening, the imitation, the music analysis, and the repetition with variations. The first step for the understanding of the music language is listening. Once the students get started listening to a variety of the cello repertoire played by renowned cellists, they start to build their own sound library into their head. This 'cello-sound-library' will help them to build an accurate musical ear that will work as an aid during their practice sessions in the future. Concurrent with this cello traditional repertoire, the students need to listen to their beginning repertoire played by skillful cellists as well. For example, if they are learning to play short melodies (4 to 8 measures) such as 'Hot Cross Buns' or 'Mary Had a Little Lamb', it is very important to listen to a professional cello performance of these songs as well, and possibly even more important than the standard repertoire because they can play these short pieces now and their ears will lead them based on the cello sound reference. One more thing to consider is if the cello teacher is not a cellist, for example, a non-cello teacher who needs to model the cello sound for their

students. It will be easier to use a preview recording of a professional cellist playing ‘Hot Cross Buns’ than trying to demonstrate it in their ‘instrument B.’

The last step of rote learning is repetition with variations. This fourth step is the ultimate level to build music language fluency on the cello. Even a beginning student can be a fluent player and it is not related to their level of sight-reading skills or the amount of repertoire they have. The practical application here is to play all five short melodies and the five transposition pieces in different keys, ranges, and with other bowings and bow strokes, including some rhythm variations. At the beginning level, there will be seven major keys for the five transposition pieces, D, C, Bb, A, G, F, and Eb major. Besides playing the same melody in different keys, the beginning cellist should be able to play it an octave lower or higher. For example, the ‘French Folk Song’ can be played in D and C major one octave lower. Another approach to the transposition pieces is to play them in minor keys. The ‘French Folk Song’ can be played in D, G, and C minor, this last one in the lower octave because of the common finger pattern.

D major C major Bb major

13 A major G major F major E-flat major

26 D major (lower octave) C major (lower octave) D minor

39 G minor C minor (lower octave)

Figure 2: Transposed French Folk Song.<sup>32</sup>

Playing by ear is quite simple after the students learn to play memorized and transposed melodies. The approach is by saying ‘I will play the first note, can you guess what is the second note?’ An ideal melody to start teaching playing by ear is ‘Happy Birthday’ because this melody is stuck in some students’ heads since they were born. Once the students guess the second note of the melody, the teacher keeps encouraging them until they figure all the notes out.

Finally comes the sight-reading. The main point here is that the sight-reading can not disturb the cello technical progress of the students. For this reason, the students are supposed to sight-read something below their technical level. For example, if they can play a G major scale in one-octave only, it means that they can sight-read open strings exercises. This approach is safe and prioritizes the basic

<sup>32</sup> Shinichi Suzuki, *Suzuki Cello School, 10 vols.* (Miami, Florida: Summy-Birchard Music, 2003).

technique. Later in the learning process, the students will be able to sight-read same-level pieces.

To summarize, these three approaches can provide a successful learning process for the students. Once the focus is not the book in front of the students, they are able to build awareness about their playing and aural skills easily.

The curriculum guidelines illustrated by the eight sequences are: concepts, teaching points, presentation/teaching segments, and technical details. The concepts are presented with an aural, visual, or kinesthetic illustration to engage the student in the learning process. For example, to teach the ringing tone the teacher will pluck the open D-string and ask the students how many sounds they hear. After the student realizes that there are two sounds after plucking the string once, the student will learn the concept of ringing tone through an aural approach. The teaching points are related to the skills that will be developed in the sequence and they include the review of basic abilities and the preparation for advanced cello skills. The presentation and the teaching segments are the strategies that are used to introduce each layer of the sequences. To conclude, the technical details provide a check list with injury prevention reminders and specific information about how to properly execute the new skills.

By approaching each concept through aural, visual, and kinesthetic illustrations, the teacher offers a pedagogy based on what their students need. For example, a student who can play with a nice mechanic, good posture, and instrument positioning but has problems with bad intonation and tone needs to develop their aural

skills. To help their student, the teacher will approach their needs through visual and kinesthetic references to ‘awaken’ their aural capabilities and enhance their perception of a desirable tone and fine intonation. Finally, this three-way approach can lead the student to a fourth learning style, the analytical.

Since the students are developing their aural skills and are learning musical elements through the cello, the identification of patterns will result in an analytical way to acquire knowledge and skills. For example, by playing different one-octave scales such as D, G, and C major with the same fingering (0134), the cello student will be able to identify major tetrachords and their relationship to different fingerings. This analytical approach will ease their path while learning note reading and music theory.

The philosophy of this proposed curriculum guidelines is based on the non-traditional pedagogy presented by Rowell, Young, and Sharp. It combines a judgement-free, holistic approach with a focus on injury prevention, student needs (not on the content), and development of a beautiful tone, along with involving the whole body in the acquisition of skills. This new philosophy illustrates a successful pedagogy designed to fix the gaps in the traditional cello books. By focusing on how we learn and how we stay motivated while learning new skills, the non-traditional pedagogy fosters new and better ways to help students to learn how to play.

Lastly, the following sequences will illustrate these guidelines and their components such as concepts, teaching points, presentation, and technical details. Each one of these sequences’ purposes was developed from a mix of pedagogical

ideas based on the three master teachers, teacher workshops, and personal experience of the author.

## II. SEQUENCES FOR CELLO INSTRUCTION

### RIGHT HAND TECHNIQUE

#### 1. Bow placement and short strokes at the middle

This sequence is a mix of ideas that the author learned from teaching workshops, while in Brazil, with Dr. David Evenchick, in 2011.

Concepts: ringing tone, balance point, bow placement, bow distribution

Teaching points: posture, cello position, relaxed bow hold, clear bow strokes, play/listen/evaluate, arm and forearm engagement

Presentation and teaching segments

The teacher will introduce this sequence by reviewing warmups for bow hold and instrument position. The first concept to be presented is the ringing tone. For this concept, the teacher will play the open D string and will ask the student: ‘how many sounds do you hear?’ The desired answer is ‘two sounds.’ And the explanation for this answer will be teacher driven. The goal is to ‘open’ the student’s ears until they realize that there is the ‘action’ sound (pizzicato) and the ‘reaction’ sound (ringing). The second concept to be introduced is the balance point. To explain it, the student will be invited to locate the balance point on their bow. After, they will place the balance point on the cello D-string with a relaxed bow grip at the frog. The teacher then will

give instructions about the best bow placement spot. The last step will be the application of a series of rhythms for bow distribution. While practicing these rhythms, the student will be asked to self-evaluate their progress. It means that, after each repetition, they will give details about their sound and the cause/effect relationship according to these assimilated concepts. For example: ‘my sound was clean because I had an appropriate bow placement, and I heard the ringing tone because the string stopped the bow.

### Open Strings Rhythms



Figure 3: Open String Rhythms.<sup>33</sup>

Technical details: check for releasing fingers on the bow hold e. time between each repetition, the string friction stops the bow and not the bow hand (passive action), using a/the shorter bow for shorter notes and vice-versa, right shoulder release along with breathing, keeping a right ‘floating’ elbow, feeling the ‘ictus’ before playing, the left-hand playing ringing tone notes as A ,D ,G , and C.

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<sup>33</sup> Rolland, 1972.

## 2. Long notes bowings

The technical content and strategies on this sequence were based on Professor Darcy Drexler's pedagogy<sup>34</sup> (The String Academy of Wisconsin), and adapted to cello instruction by the author.

Concepts: dynamic bow hold, ringing tone, bow placement, bow distribution, bow speed, bow direction

Teaching points: staccato, slurred staccato, forearm usage, forearm usage, right fingers articulation

Presentation and teaching segments

This sequence starts with the review of short and ringing open strings. After this short review, the teacher plays two staccato notes in one direction (i.e. slurred staccato in a down bow). As a concept reinforcement (in this case ringing tone), the teacher asks the student if he can hear the harmonics produced at the stops of the bow. After the teacher's demonstration, the student does the same in a down bow, then in an up bow – two slurred one-beat notes. The sequence follows with three and four notes on the same bowings as well.

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<sup>34</sup> Darcy Drexler, *Festival de Musica de Uberlandia, String Workshop* (Uberlandia, Minas Gerais, Brazil, 2007).

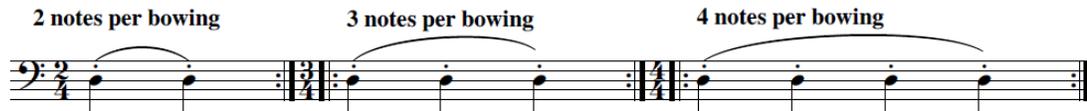


Figure 4: Warmup for long bowings I.<sup>35</sup>

Another fundamental concept for this sequence is the dynamic bow hold. It means that the bow hold can be adjusted by engaging the fingers' articulation. For this purpose, the teacher will present a new game called 'reaching the moon' by Phyllis Young. In this game, the student needs to keep his bow tip pointing *up* while moving it closer to and away from the ceiling using their right arm. This movement will engage their fingers, elbow, and shoulder. This combination of movements is the same that the student needs while playing long notes with the whole extension of the hair.

The third step is to combine the dynamic bow hold and the slurred staccato notes. Basically, the student will play the same sequence as before. However, they will need to sustain the last note in each bowing as a fermata-note (see figure below). By sustaining the last note, the cello student will train bow distribution in his right arm. Also, by engaging his fingers while playing at the . tip of the bow or at the . bottom, the student will master the dynamic bow hold.

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<sup>35</sup> Drexler, 2007.

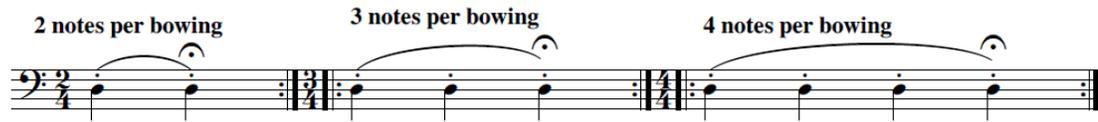


Figure 5: Warmup for long bowings II.<sup>36</sup>

To conclude this sequence, the teacher will use an imagery approach *such as* ‘chocolate bars’ analogy. The explanation is simple; pretend that each of these short notes are chocolate bars and they are being placed on a hot surface. After this visual explanation, the student will easily play long and sustained long notes.

The success of this sequence is related to the approach of the ringing staccato before the long notes.

Technical details: release and align *the* right shoulder, elbow, wrist, and fingers, keep the bow on the same placement spot, keep the sound up and ringing, engage the forearm

### 3. Slurred String Crossing

This sequence is a combination of mixed approaches, including teaching strategies from Suzuki training, Margaret Rowell’s approach, and personal experience of the author.

Concepts: big and small muscles synchronized movements, right arm alignment, bow angle, bow parallelism

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<sup>36</sup> Drexler, 2007.

Teaching points: engagement of fingers on the dynamic bow hold (not the wrist), engagement of the right elbow, ‘rocking the bow’ on the strings, playing four strings in one bow as a single gesture

#### Presentation and teaching segments

The presentation starts with two games. The first is a simple and fun game called ‘Pinocchio & Chicken.’ The cello student would need to touch his nose with the tip of his bow to make the ‘Pinocchio’, and then point the bow at the teacher’s nose while keeping their right elbow touching their ribs to make the ‘chicken’. In both cases, the bow hair has to face down. The goal in this game is to synchronize big and small muscles in a single gesture (elbow and fingers).

The following game is called ‘silent & noisy bow’. In this game, the cello student will apply the same synchronized movement from the ‘Pinocchio & Chicken.’ However, he will need to place his bow on the cello bridge and ‘draw’ its shape by moving the bow frog back and forth. The bow will reach the C-string on the ‘Chicken’ position, and the A-string on the ‘Pinocchio’ position because of this movement. After a few repetitions and some fluent movements, the student will place their bow on the strings to make the ‘noisy’ bow. The difference now is that they will pull and push the bow while actually playing.

This sequence works because it teaches the bow angle from a natural movement and not from a frustrating attempt to keep the bow on the correct string. Also, this game can work as a tool to solve bow parallelism to the bridge. The teacher

just needs to say ‘more Pinocchio’ when the student’s bow is not making a right angle in relation to the A-string.

Finally, this sequence is ideal to prepare the required bow skills on Dupport Etude in G minor. But the next step for this sequence would be a technical exercise by Margaret Rowell. This exercise follows the same natural approach to the string crossing, but it expands the skill by rhythmically organizing it.

Technical details: keep the sound up, fluent gesture, synchronize big and small muscles.

### Slurred String Crossings



Figure 6: Slurred String Crossings.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. String Crossing

The author adapted the Becker’s variation for beginning cellists and developed this whole sequence based on his own experience.

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<sup>37</sup> Rolland, 1972.

Concepts: pivot elbow, clockwise and counterclockwise motion

Teaching points: bow placement on the higher string, finger/bow synchrony

Presentation and teaching segments

This sequence would start by reviewing short bowings and some warmups of the slurred string crossing. One of the new concepts in this sequence is the pivot elbow that would be presented by a kinesthetic approach. The teacher would ask the student to touch their right knee with their hand while keeping their right elbow floating. After this introduction, the student would do the same with his elbow. They would place their bow on the A-string then cross it to the D-string but keeping their elbow as a ‘pivot’.

The second part of this sequence is the clockwise and counterclockwise movements. With the game ‘flying pizzicato’, the student would learn the clockwise movement (the same as the bow retake). The flying pizzicato requires that the cello student pluck an open string by drawing circles in the air. After that, they would do the same with the bow by playing a series of down bows (i.e. retakes). Once the student learns this motion, they would keep their bow on the A-string and play this ‘clockwise motion’ on the A and D strings (ADAD) several times until a natural gesture and even rhythm is established.

To conclude, the cello student would reverse the movement and start playing from the D string (DADA). In order to enhance his skills, the cello student would practice an adapted version of the Becker Spiccato variations. The original version of

the Becker's variations was written to be played on the 4th position of the cello and has a chromatic motion on the melodic line (C B Bb A Bb B C). The adapted version is in the first position, has a diatonic motion on the melodic line (G F# E F# G F# E D), and, unlike the original, is easily adaptable to upper strings and bass, if needed. Lastly, the goal here is to build skills related to string crossing rather than bouncing bowings. This sequence will provide the cello student an essential skill to play tricky string crossings as an advanced student. The Popper Etude #6 is an example of various string crossing challenges, and it requires a vast vocabulary of bow motions such as clockwise and counterclockwise motions. These bow technique skills need to be nurtured as soon as possible in the cello students' studies in order to avoid obstacles in the future.

Technical details: alignment from the right shoulder to the fingers, small bow strokes, dynamic bow hold, pivot right elbow, synchrony with left-hand fingers.

## Becker's Variations

Adapted by Rodrigo Pessoa

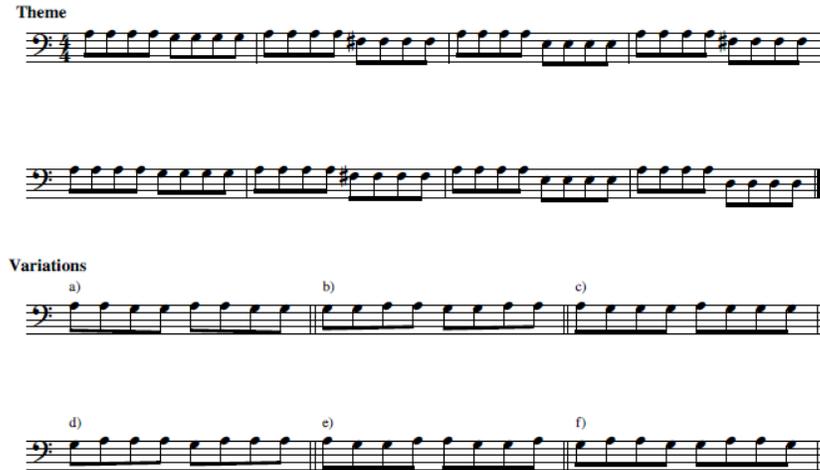


Figure 7: Becker's Variations.<sup>38</sup>

### 5. Spiccato

This sequence combines a visual approach by Mrs. Young<sup>39</sup> and teaching strategies elaborated by the author.

Concepts: what sustains the bow, bouncing bow, balance point

Teaching points: released bow hold, 'glued fingers' on the bow hold, controlled and uncontrolled bowings

Presentation and teaching segments

The main reason to present this sequence at the beginning level is because it teaches an ideal bow hold earlier. Usually, beginning cellists squeeze their bow frogs

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<sup>38</sup> Hugo Becker and Dago Rynar, *Mechanik und Ästhetik des Violoncellspiels* (1929).

<sup>39</sup> Young, 1978.

to get a more secure bowing, which is not workable on a more advanced level. For this reason, the first thing to teach is the right sensation while holding the bow, that needs to be light and relaxed. The teacher will apply ‘the slowest bow hold’ game. The goal of this game is to keep the bow hold shape at the same time you release your fingers and let the stick slide through your fingers. The ‘slowest bow is the winner. After a couple of practices of this game, the cello student will get a light and relaxed sensation on their bow hold, ideal for the spiccato practice.

The second game is one created by Phyllis Young and it is called ‘The dripping wet hand.’<sup>40</sup> This visual approach to the bow hold is functional when you tell your student that their hands are full of glue. After saying that, ask the cello student to grab his bow and feel how the fingers are now ‘glued’ to the bow frog, the student should feel that they do not need to squeeze it any tighter to get control.



Figure 8: The Dripping Wet Hand.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Young, 1978.

<sup>41</sup> Young, 1978.

The third game is the ‘bouncing bows at the tip of the bow.’ To demonstrate it, the teacher holds the tip of his bow, with his left-hand, over the D-string. It is necessary to release the bow hold as much as possible while keeping a steady index finger to avoid any bow dropping. After this setting up, the teacher lets the tip of his bow bounce on the D-string and asks the student to do the same. Note: the result of this game will be successful if the bow bounces five times or more. Also, it will be possible only if the bow hold is relaxed. To conclude this sequence, the student will try the same thing by playing closer to the balance point. Once the student’s bow is at the balance point, they will try to move their bow evenly in a down bow sequence: at first, only two notes, then four, then eight.

After a couple of weeks practicing this sequence, the student will be able to play a one-octave scale with spiccato bowings. This approach works because it starts with a concept and not as a single exercise. The students start the process by experimenting with the concept and once they are actually playing the exercise, they are aware of major components related to the concept, including gestures, sensations, and sound production.

Technical details: keep a steady and relaxed bow hold, bouncing bowings with ringing tones, clear tone, and clean sound.

6. From left-hand placement to shifting

This sequence is a mixed approach of Rowell's and Sharp's teaching strategies to the left-hand technique with a contribution of Mrs. Hockett's warmup<sup>42</sup> for shifting skills.

Concepts: alignment, energy from the back to the fingers, fingerboard as a whole

Teaching points: left-hand placement, vertical approach to the fingerboard first, big muscles start

Presentation and teaching segments

This sequence is based on the needs of an advanced cellist. Instead of starting from the first position and staying stuck there for a long time, the cello student needs to get the big picture at the first lesson. The first thing is to set up their posture and instrument position, and release muscles by moving their shoulders in circular motions, and their necks in 'yes', 'no', and 'maybe' motions. Also, to establish a good body balance, it is fundamental to practice some kinesthetic games such as 'bear hug' and 'bird wings' by Irene Sharp.<sup>43</sup> The goal of these two games is to establish a balanced cello position while moving the body laterally. The bear hug requires that the student 'hugs' their cello, and the bird wings is about opening their arms to engage the cellist's legs and chest in the instrument positioning and free their arms.

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<sup>42</sup> Carolyn McCall, *Group Lessons for Suzuki Violin and Viola* (New York: Alfred Music, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> Sharp, 2003.

Once the set-up is done, the left-hand placement starts with a series of warmups: the ‘knock-knuckles’ for left elbow alignment and releasing of shoulder, wrist, and fingers, and the ‘ski jumps’ for engagement of the elbow and its connection with left-hand fingers. From here, the student could place his hand on the first position and start to play the first melodies, scales, and book exercises because the elbow-fingers alignment is already established. Also, it is time to explore the vertical movements of the left-hand with shifting.

Moving on to the shifting skills, there are some games to be included on this sequence. The first one is the ‘touch your head/left knee.’ This can be used while playing a D major scale or any song with open strings. The cello student is supposed to touch his head every time they play an open D-string, and their left knee when playing the open A-string. Later, he can touch the cello scroll and the bridge instead of the head and knee, respectively. The goal of this game is to engage the left-hand in shifting by activating a vertical movement. Besides the two landing points for the left-hand (scroll and bridge), we would include a third one by adding the octave harmonic. This natural harmonic is easy to play, but it would require a sticker on its spot to facilitate the localization by the student. In this case, the cello student would play the harmonic instead of open strings.

The next game for shifting is called ‘shuttle back and forth’ by Margaret Rowell.<sup>44</sup> This game is a continuation of ‘ski jumps’ but this one is played along with

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<sup>44</sup> Rolland, 1972.

a tremolo bowing. The goal is to synchronize both hands. The right hand moves horizontally and the left-hand moves vertically but with the tremolo it is quite easier to manage. Since this game requires more practice before moving to the long notes along with the ‘siren’ movement, the sequence will require a transitional warmup.

The transitional warmup is called ‘countdown,’ by Mrs. Carey B. Hockett.<sup>45</sup> This is a versatile warmup that enhances the shifting skills of the cellists by playing a ‘silly’ melody. At first, the cellist is asked to match his perfect fourth by alternating the octave harmonic and the fourth finger. Then moving to the shifting including the second and third positions. The last stage for this warmup would be sustaining the same pitch (the fourth) with finger substitution.

### Countdown



Figure 9: Countdown Shifting Game.<sup>46</sup>

To conclude this sequence, we would add the one-finger scale in one string. This scale teaches a shifting that is led by the big muscles. After practicing the ‘sirens’ and the ‘countdown’, the cello student will feel more confident to explore the fingerboard mapping vertically in only one string. The first one-finger scale is the B-flat major with first finger on the A-string. This scale practice will review the same

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<sup>45</sup> McCall, 1993.

<sup>46</sup> McCall, 1993.

concepts and skills already presented and developed before. However, the cello student will be challenged to ‘measure’ his steps and half-steps shifting.

### One-Finger Scale

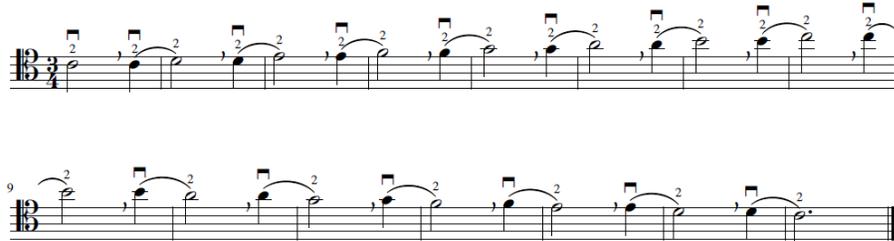


Figure 10: One-Finger Scale.<sup>47</sup>

From the beginning level, the cello student can be introduced to a vertical approach to the cello fingerboard. Doing so will provide confidence and awareness while playing in higher positions instead of nurturing fear and insecurity about other cello positions.

Technical details: attention to the tone by watching the bow placement, open strings, and ringing tones as reference for intonation. In addition, it is a good moment to introduce the drones for pitch reference and develop a broader concept of intonation by playing group of notes instead of single pitches.

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<sup>47</sup> Sharp, 2003.

## Shuttle Back and Forth

Shift as high as you can! The high notes shown are approximate.

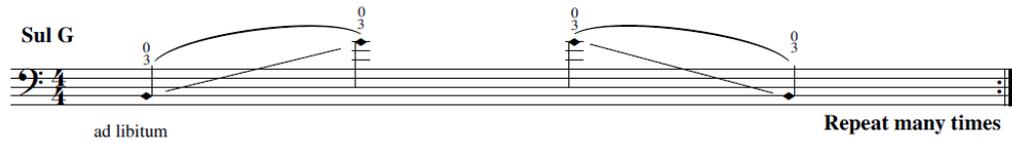


Figure 11: Shuttle Back and Forth.<sup>48</sup>

### 7. Transposition melodies

The idea of transposition melodies was presented to the author while he was working on his bachelor's in music education in Brazil (Federal University of Sao Carlos, 2009 – 2013). Playing the same melody in different keys (without note reading) is a required skill for musical fluency in playing the cello and it should be nurtured in beginning students. This sequence was built on this pedagogical concept and includes a mix of ideas presented by the master teachers.

Concepts: step and skip, intervals, finger patterns, hand shape, same pitch, octave, fingerings, transposition melodies, intervals

Teaching points: find all C's, pedagogical repertoire, scales and arpeggios introduction

Presentation and teaching segments

To teach the cello fingerboard mapping we would use a small repertoire of pieces. This repertoire is based on short melodies and some folk songs that can be easily transposed to another key. The purpose of this transposition repertoire is to expose the cello student to a big range of possibilities while playing the cello from the

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<sup>48</sup> Rolland, 1972.

beginning level. Also, these transposition melodies can introduce a lot of musical concepts such as intervals, scales and arpeggios, and major and minor keys etc.

The first game to this sequence is called find all C's. In this game, the cello student is challenged to locate all C's on the cello fingerboard. For example, we can find three C's in the first position – open C-string, 4<sup>th</sup> finger on the G-string, and 2<sup>nd</sup> finger on the A-string. This is an initial approach that we can call 'level 1'. For a 'level 2' approach, we can include the one-octave harmonic on the C-string and the C played on the D-string, fourth position. To expand it to a 'level 3' game, we would make a combination with another game previously learned. The goal for the 'level 3', it is not only to teach left-hand technique, but it is also to improve the student's aural skills. The previously learned and mastered 'siren' game will add more possibilities to the 'level 3'. In the 'siren' game, the student freely slides their four fingers all across the fingerboard (in one string only) and plays a tremolo bowing. At level 3, he will combine the 'Siren' with the 'Find all the C's' game and actively engage their ears to help their fingers find the desired pitch. After mastering the 'C's', the student would move to the 'D's' and so on. The main goal is to master the fingerboard mapping as much as possible.

Along with the 'find all C's' game, the student would learn a repertoire by rote learning to enhance his fingerboard mapping understanding. All these melodies would be played in an initial key, generally in D major, then transposed to other keys. See the example of the 'French Folk Song' as the many possibilities for transposition. Also, every time a known melody is presented in a different key, it is learned by rote

learning, or by ear. To conclude, the cello student will not learn this repertoire by reading because the purpose is the development of the fingerboard understanding along with aural skills.

Another possibility while teaching this initial repertoire is the understanding of musical concepts. For example, while playing ‘French Folk Song’ the student is moving by steps, which means that he is playing a scale. Likewise, if they are playing the beginning of ‘Song of the Wind’, they are moving by skips, which is similar to an arpeggio. To sum, by learning a small initial repertoire by rote learning and memorizing it, or even playing it by ear, makes the learning process more interesting. Also, the introduction of musical terminology makes more sense when playing it instead of reading in a book. Lastly, their reading skills will come in a more natural way because of their previous experience.

Technical details: since the use of tapes is not recommended for beginning cellists (because it can cause positioning issues and limitation of the aural skill development), the teacher needs to provide sufficient aural reference to his student by using open strings, harmonics, ringing tones pitches, and drones. For the transposition repertoire, it is crucial that the student learn e. finger pattern before playing the ‘old melody’ in the ‘new key’.

#### 8. Scales and arpeggios

The sequence for scales and arpeggios is a mix of personal experience of the author combined with content from Suzuki method’s strategy presented in various

teacher trainings by Dr. David Evenchick and Dr. Tanya Carey (Sao Paulo/Brazil and Chicago/USA, 2011 – 2020).

Concepts: finger patterns, same pitch, hand shape, similar or different, one-octave, two-octaves

Teaching points: tetrachords, keep back fingers down

Presentation and teaching segments

The presentation of the series of cello scales would start with open string and the first finger pattern: 0134. Once the student learns this finger pattern, they can play three scales in one octave: D, G, and C major. The arpeggio would be introduced as ‘first, third and fifth notes of the one-octave scale.’ The student would be able to figure out ‘DF#A’, and the teacher would complement by saying ‘repeat the first note on the higher pitch (high D).’ The same information would apply for the G and C major arpeggios as well.

The second series of scales are the F and C major scales and arpeggios, but this time starting with the fourth finger and with the second finger pattern ‘0124.’ These two scales start with fourth finger and go until the second finger, not to the fourth. The same thing happens to the arpeggios.

Once the student learns how to play two C major scales, they are introduced to the two-octave scales and arpeggios. The next two-octave scale is the G major. As a preparatory skill, to introduce the fingering on the fourth position, the student would play the C major two-octave scale and arpeggio by going to the fourth position on the

D-string to play ‘ABC’ (fingering 134) instead of playing these pitches on the A-string. This approach to the fourth position by playing an ‘old’ material will help the student’s understanding over fingering choice in the future and to the G major two-octave scale and arpeggio as well because it is the same fingering.

The process of learning a single scale and arpeggio is associated to a previous one, or by modifying the fingering. To conclude, the last scale and arpeggio of this series for beginning cellists would be the C major in three octaves. As a pedagogical tool, we would use the trichord to enhance the student’s awareness over the fingerboard mapping. In this case, the cello student would play the trichord ‘ABC’ on the G-string (1<sup>st</sup> pos.), D-string (4<sup>th</sup> position), A-string (first position), and A-string (7<sup>th</sup> position). The concept in this case is that they all are the same pitches. They just changed the octaves and the location of the trichord (same fingering, in a different string). After this fingerboard experiment the student will feel ready to play the whole C major three-octave scale and arpeggio.

Technical details: there are three finger patterns ‘134’, ‘124’, and ‘X124’ – each one of these finger patterns will behave differently in each string and position. The teacher needs to remind the student about his basic left-hand set up (i.e., always start from the scratch).

## CHAPTER IV

### I. CONCLUSION

This study is a proposal of guidelines for a beginning level cello curriculum. The traditional cello books were discussed as part of the analysis of the old school and its curriculum and philosophy. By citing three major non-traditional master teachers and their pedagogical approaches, this document discussed the major components of a cello pedagogy that would be more adaptable to the largest number of cello students from diverse musical backgrounds.

The non-traditional pedagogy brought a new perspective to the cello teaching process. This new perspective is the cellist themselves. Traditional pedagogy has mainly focused on note reading by teaching fingerboard mapping only. But when it tends to value intonation so much, it can spill over into an unnatural basic technique. Commands such as ‘stretch your third finger, it is flat, fix it’ are common in traditional string classes. Within a pedagogy that values note reading above the cello technique, it can be confusing because the student is focusing in a specific skill (note reading) most of the time, which makes their ears less engaged in the process. For this reason, it is better if the teacher’s approach focuses on the understanding of tone and resonance instead of isolated notes and their location on the fingerboard. In the non-traditional pedagogy, the note reading is developed in a level below the technical level of the cello student. It means that the cello student is not supposed to struggle with technical elements while playing from a cello book because they already learned all that content before while

practicing warmups, scales, technical exercises, and repertoire by rote learning and playing by ear. To summarize, this multiple approach to the cello playing is a three-way method of teaching the instrument, and it is based on what the student needs.

With a visual, kinesthetic, and aural approach to the cello technique, the student could feel capable of acquiring new skills and refining old ones. Since the cello skills are presented as part of a path to a specific advanced technique, the student could be able to visualize the big picture through layers of skills. This fact will enhance their engagement in the process and will illustrate the need of a consistent practice, including the repetition of new skills and the reviewing of learned ones. It means that the student will never abandon old tasks while learning new elements but will see the connection between the basic skills and the advanced. Another important element is the chronological presentation of each skill. While the traditional books limited their contents to the first position, and a few bow strokes, these sequences are based on the need for an advanced cello technique. Instead of following a limited curriculum, the sequences are made to prepare the students to play advanced repertoire by prioritizing the basic technique and avoiding injuries as well. Lastly, as a whole-body-teaching-approach, the development of aural skills is a major component of these non-traditional curriculum guidelines.

These guidelines are illustrated by eight sequences that are based on non-traditional pedagogy and on the need for an advanced technique. When teaching the cello to beginning students, the teacher needs to provide an approach based on their needs focusing on the preparedness for the advanced technique. It means that the

advanced level curriculum defines a more specific set of skills that cello students are supposed to master before learning a more challenging content. Technical contents such as fingerboard mapping, spiccato, and scales in three octaves can be introduced much earlier in the process since the teacher learns how to present a series of skills in well-connected sequences. Finally, these sequences are effective because they do not rely upon pre-established contents but are based on the students' needs for the advanced technique. Also, these sequences are presented in well-connected layers of skills that are meant to be reviewed, repeated, and polished in order to enhance the students' basic skills and to prevent injuries.

This study will contribute to future research concerning cello pedagogy for beginning cellists. This future research will provide more details on the curriculum guidelines such as the inclusion of the study of intervals and a consideration of how breathing exercises can meaningfully contribute to cello practice and performance. In addition, I will be conducting interviews with active cello pedagogues to collect qualitative data about their pedagogical approaches in order to explore which existing teaching strategies work the best with the strategies that I have developed earlier in this study.

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