An examination of the issues of non-string teachers teaching strings

Melissa May Newbrey

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE ISSUES OF
NON-STRING TEACHERS
TEACHING STRINGS

by

Melissa May Newbrey

Bachelor of Fine Arts
University of Arizona
2001

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Music Degree in Arts
Department of Music
College of Fine Arts

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
December 2008
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Entitled
An Examination of the Issues of Non-String Teachers Teaching Strings

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Music

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Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative
ABSTRACT

An Examination of the Issues of Non-String Teachers Teaching Strings

by

Melissa May Newbrey

Dr. Eugenie Burkett, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Music Education
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

The purpose of this study was to examine the training of non-string teachers who teach strings in Nevada secondary schools, as well as their approach to first-year string teaching issues. Sixty current string and non-string teachers across Nevada voluntarily responded to the survey portion of this study. Two non-string teachers teaching strings in Nevada and two string professors were chosen for the interview portion of this study. Results found that fewer non-string teachers were required to take string methods class than string teachers. Fewer non-string teachers compared to string teachers thought their string methods class was applicable to their first year of teaching strings. String professors expected that non-string music education majors possess skills that would enable them to play well enough to get them through a typical first year. Data from this study also showed that non-string teachers can become successful string teachers if they pursue assistance experienced string teachers.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my husband, Brian, for all of his limitless support, understanding and grounded encouragement (not to mention cooking countless dinners and attention to the details!) since I first fathomed pursuing this degree. To my parents, Mark and Tina Christianson, for the values they instilled in me – independence, tenacity, and above all, perseverance. Words cannot express my gratitude to Dr. Eugenie Burkett who positively supported me throughout this project and offered her extensive knowledge and experience. Expressions of deep appreciation are also extended to dear friends who assisted with labeling and technological issues, but more importantly, endless encouragement and advice. Sincere thanks to my advisory committee who read and edited my thesis.
Lowell Mason, in his 1837 petition to the Boston school board to include vocal music in the elementary schools, stated that music was a “mighty power” which would “humanize, refine and elevate the whole community” and was therefore worthy of consideration in the school curriculum (Abeles, Hoffer, & Klotman, 1995, p. 12 as cited in Birge, 1966, pp.41-42). Music has since become a major part of American school curriculum, and although string education was not included until years later, its purpose was similar. According to Abeles et al., string education sought to bring refinement and civilization to American society in the early 20th century, serving as a catalyst to pay homage to the history of the string tradition created centuries earlier in Europe.

The Rise of String Education

String education in American secondary schools had a strong, promising beginning. In 1911 Albert G. Mitchell modeled his Boston violin classes after the large music group instruction he had observed in England. His *The Mitchell Class Method for Violin* (1924) focused on techniques for large class instruction, the beginning of successful instrumental class teaching in the United States (Abeles et al.; Wassell, 1954). A study based on a questionnaire sent out by Gladys Brown to those music teachers in attendance at a March 1915 meeting of the Music Supervisors National Conference revealed that 72 of 76 schools had a musical organization of some type. Of those 72 schools, 66 had an
orchestra (Brown, 1916). Continuing on this rise of large instrumental class instruction was Will Earhart, director of orchestra at Richmond High School in Richmond, Indiana, who was known for setting a precedent of high teaching standards for strings in the beginning of the 20th century (Mark & Gary, 2007). These standards were carried on by Earhart’s successor, Joseph E. Maddy (Abeles et al.). Maddy was a well known advocate of instrumental music education and took his National High School Orchestra to perform for the Department of Superintendence of the National Education Association in Dallas in 1927. He and his ensemble left such an impression that the superintendents voted to recommend that music and art receive treatment and support equal to all other academic subjects (Gordan, 1956; Mark & Gary). Once this recommendation was adopted, the number of school orchestras began to grow. A survey conducted by Edward B. Birge a few years later indicated that of 352 high schools across 26 states, 267 offered string orchestra courses (Gordan, 1956), suggesting that the string programs in the United States were on the rise.

The Decline of String Education

String education enjoyed a place as the largest and most popular instrumental program until after World War I. During the war numerous army bands promoted strong patriotism within Americans. These feelings remained fervent after the war as returning bandsmen were hired to establish and teach bands in schools (Abeles et al.). Interest in bands continued to rise and many army bandsmen took advantage of the G. I. bill and attended college to be educated as band directors (Abeles et al.). While the number of bands in schools increased, the string programs were losing members. As Horace B. Conway points out in his 1949 Music Educators Journal article regarding the cause of the
drop of string students, “successful string development in thousands of smaller communities is now almost non-existent” (p. 19). String programs continued to lose their status in instrumental music education due to the rise of dance bands heard on the radio and marching bands seen at parades and sporting events. This was often the only exposure the general audience had to quality music, and this was the direction their musical affinities turned (Conway, 1949). String orchestras were still performing traditional European music with which general American audiences had little to no connection, and even then the string ensembles rarely made such public appearances as did the bands. As Michael Mark and Charles Gary state, “The bands, especially those of Gilmore and Sousa, entertained their audiences with their superb showmanship. The bands met the popular needs of the people, and the orchestras maintained the traditions of the old World” (p. 297). Marching bands played an integral part in promoting school pride at sporting events and were therefore not only functional, but also a good public relations tool (Abeles et al.; Mark & Gary).

The lack of functionality in the string programs combined with the aggressive popularity of the band programs launched a downward spiral in the quality and status of string programs in American secondary schools. Exacerbating this downfall was the shortage of string teachers capable of teaching group lessons and guiding ensembles in the public schools. Conway suggests that prior to the Depression, string programs relied heavily on private instructors to teach basic instrumental skills. Economic hardships made private instruction unaffordable. As a result, more responsibility was placed on the classroom string teacher to cover basic technical and musical skills. Additionally, colleges were graduating few string music educators and those that were completing
baccalaureate degrees had little to no classroom teaching experience. Many were often unable to manage more than two to three students at a time.

Conway also indicates that string teachers were using “antiquated” methods, such as “traditional materials and procedures”, and were not willing to progress with improvements in teaching (p. 53). This led to a drop in student interest for string programs, a drop in student participation, and the beginning of a “vicious circle” of fewer string majors, which led to fewer string teachers to teach strings in schools, which led to fewer string students to become string majors (p. 52). Of the small number of students still interested in string education, many were not properly prepared to teach upon graduation because they were taught by professors with little to no public school teaching experience (Boney, 1969; String Teacher Roundtable, 1979).

According to an investigation made by Schmidt in 1989, only 50% of teacher training schools required music education students to take 8 to 15 hours of “string technique work” and 39% required 8 to 15 hours of string class teaching methodology, while many schools required only one semester of combined string techniques and methods courses.

Interest in string programs in schools rose in the 1980s. In a study by Leonhard (1991), schools began to see greater numbers of student participation that continued on through the 1990s. Subsequent research has shown that an increase of string student enrollment continued from the 1970s to the 1990s (Smith, 1995).

However, the number of string teachers has not increased with the increase in student participation (Gillespie & Hamann, 1998). The quality of string teacher education was still somewhat lacking. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents in the same study rated their string collegiate training “adequate or below” (p. 84).
Attempts to Restore String Education through Teacher Training

Numerous attempts have been made to rectify the string situation in American secondary schools, and many of these efforts are correlated to the quality of string teachers and their training. Beginning as early as 1924, Russell V. Morgan, the supervisor of instrumental music in Cleveland, Ohio, suggested the need for a well-rounded instrumental education. In an article published in the Music Supervisors’ Journal, Morgan advocated “pedagogical training” that would consist of “a very definite and intensive course on the methods of organizing and conducting bands, orchestras, and all varieties of instrumental classes” (p. 56). Similar recommendations have been made over the last several decades. Joan Boney suggested “School Orchestra Literature”, “Organization and Administration of the School Orchestra”, and “Elementary and Intermediate String Methods and Materials” as ideas for good pedagogy courses for a well-rounded string teacher (1973, p. 60). In 1947, Duane Haskell, in an effort to promote the Music Educators National Conference (MENC) String Instruction Committee, helped to organize the American String Teachers Association (ASTA). Formed in 1948 as an outgrowth of the MENC committee, ASTA works not only to counteract the surge of interest in band (Ables et al.), but also as a way to promote “the advancement of string teaching” (ASTA Introduction, 2008).

A survey of string education students suggested that current string teachers promote the benefits of their teaching profession in a more positive light and that they should provide more challenging music to their young students (Gillespie & Hamann, 1999). According to Turner in 2001, another solution to restoring string education can be
found in learning from the mistakes of string educations past to ensure these same mistakes are not repeated in the present or future.

Numerous symposia and research studies have been dedicated to the advancement and improvement of string teachers. Gillespie, in his 1997 *American String Teacher* article, states, “For the past 3 years virtually every symposium, session, and research study designed to address the problems in the string teaching profession have identified a shortage of string teachers as one of the most critical concerns of the profession” (p. 64). Attempts to address concerns and revise string teacher training in colleges and universities may be found in reports from major symposia including the Tanglewood Symposia (1963), the Loyola Symposium (1986), the MENC ad Hoc Committee on String Orchestra Education (1987), the Wichita State University Symposium (1996), and the MENC National in-service Conference (1996) (Gillespie, 1997). In 1995, the ASTA National Convention discussed new recommendations for string teacher training in colleges and universities. In 1999, the National String Project Consortium provided encouragement to string majors to become string education majors. The Changing String Teacher Training to Meet the Needs of the Year 2000 session included a panel discussion to design effective string teacher training curriculum and experiences for the new millennium (Oliver, 1995).

Many string pedagogues throughout the history of string education have made significant contributions to the continuation of school string programs. Anne Mischakoff lists several famous pedagogues and string performers who created innovative string instruction methods in an article from *The Instrumentalist*, “Strings: The Golden Age of Pedagogy” (1995). This list cites Janos Starker, Ivan Galamian, Dorothy Delay, Shinichi
Suzuki, Paul Rolland, Phyllis Young, and Margaret Rowell as central figures in string education advancement (p. 50). Other contemporary string education advocates include but are certainly not limited to Robert Gillespie, Donald Hamann, Dean Angeles, and Jacquelyn Dillon-Krass.

**Role of Non-String Teachers in String Education**

While these string education advocates have worked tirelessly to improve the quality of string education in the United States, there continues to be a shortage of string teachers. In an effort to offset the lack of string teachers and maintain viable string programs in secondary schools, school supervisors and administrators began to hire music teachers with alternate backgrounds. As early as 1949, T. Smith McCorckle made the suggestion that band and choral teachers create string programs in their schools. He proposed that band or chorus teachers attend an intensive 12-week in-service over the course of the summer to prepare themselves to at least initiate a string program in their school. Since then the lack of string teachers has forced many band teachers not only to begin a string program in their school, but also add strings permanently to their responsibilities as band directors (Smith, 1995). A survey administered to members of the National School Orchestra Association (NSOA) by Roy Robert Jenkins confirmed that 30% of the respondents were non-string teachers teaching strings. This was confirmed in Gillespie and Hamann’s 1995 study in which the data revealed that one in every three string teachers was not primarily a string player.

In a 2001 American String Teacher article, Steve Burch advocated for the support of non-string teachers teaching strings in schools, stating that string education could benefit from the diversity of teachers with an alternate background by, “branching out
and discovering some of the rich heritage of string music that has been given to us outside the world of classical music” (p. 116).

As evidenced in the aforementioned studies, the responsibility of future string education in this country lies partially with recruiting and training non-string teachers. Given this situation, the preparation of non-string teachers must be examined to make certain that public school students are receiving the highest quality education possible.

*Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study is to gain information that will improve string music education pedagogy. Specifically, this research will examine the issues of non-string teachers who teach strings in Nevada secondary schools.

*Research Questions*

This study will address the following issues:

*String Teacher Training through String Methods Class*

What is the difference in the attitudes between string and non-string teachers toward their string methods class?

What is the content and approach of string professors in music colleges/ universities toward their string methods courses and students with non-string background in these courses?

*Approaches to First-Year String Teaching Issues*

How effective are teacher workshops, in-service clinics, and mentors in the development of non-string teacher teaching strings?

Which string-related issues do non-string teachers find most challenging?
How do band/piano/guitar-trained teachers whose primary instrument is not string address specific string issues in their teaching (i.e. bowing, articulation, dynamics, balance, blend, tuning, intonation, instrument repair, string literature, method books, posture)?

Definition of Terms

For purposes of this study, “non-string teachers” are defined as teacher whose primary instrument focus in under-graduate school was piano, guitar, or any band instrument. Vocal and choral teachers are not included in this study because it is in a school administrator’s best interests to make every attempt to hire music educators within their specific grouping of either “vocal” or “instrumental”. (According to the Nevada Department of Education website, three semesters of technique and pedagogy in string, woodwind, brass, percussion instruments is required for instrumental music majors.) It is therefore more infrequent that a vocalist would be found teaching an instrumental class such as strings. “String teachers” are educators whose primary instrument focus in undergraduate school was any stringed instrument including the violin, viola, cello, and/or bass. “Peer teaching” refers to any practice teaching among students with similar levels of background experience, with the ultimate goal of learning and modeling effective instructional strategies

Limitations of the Study

The survey portion of this study was limited to secondary string educators teaching in Nevada during the 2007 to 2008 school year. The interview portion was divided into two subject groups. The first subject group was limited to current non-string teachers in Nevada who had only been teaching between two and four years. The second subject
group was limited to professors responsible for training string teachers in music colleges and universities that were widely acknowledged for the high quality of their programs. The results of this study, while relevant to many secondary schools, colleges, and universities across the United States, is limited to the issues and context of non-string teachers in Nevada.

In order for this study to be thorough in its examination, an in-depth review of relevant literature is required.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

For the purposes of this study, literature relevant to examining the issues of non-string teachers teaching strings is divided into two categories. The first category involves current string teacher's attitudes and perceptions toward their undergraduate string training, and their effectiveness in teaching strings classes. The second category discusses the content and approach of string professors toward non-string students in their undergraduate string methods class.

**Attitudes and Perceptions Toward Undergraduate String Training**

In an effort to maintain string programs, many schools have hired instrumental teachers whose primary instrument was not a string instrument to teach string classes. It is important that these teachers feel confident in the skills they acquired in undergraduate school for them to even consider teaching outside of their primary instrument training. Several studies have found that this is not the case.

A study by Jennifer Mishra published in the *Journal of String Research* in 2006 implemented a survey to a small subject population (n=19) of pre-service teachers whose major instrument was not a bowed string instrument. The purpose of the study was to investigate the pre-service teachers' attitudes towards teaching strings. For the purposes of this study, "pre-service teachers" were undergraduate students training to be teachers.
The survey consisted of open-ended questions such as: 1) Would you take a job that was primarily band, but included one class of strings?, 2) Would you take a job that was primarily strings?, 3) Would you take a high school job that included conducting a full or pit orchestra?, 4) What do you feel are your strengths/weaknesses in teaching strings?

The survey was administered to the students at both the beginning and end of their single-semester string methods class to determine whether there were any changes in attitude over the course of the class. The data indicate that most of the participants would be comfortable with one string class (n=18), but less confident with a full-time string teaching job (numbers were not reported by the researcher) due to a lack of knowledge. Many participants felt they had the strengths necessary to teach a higher-level string classes because it was presumed that older students required less technical attention and more musical attention than younger students. It was also discovered that pre-service teachers felt their strengths to teach strings lay in their general musical skills and personality, and their weaknesses lay in their playing ability and knowledge of strings.

According to the second survey implemented at the completion of the semester of the string methods class, participants commented on their lack of experience and knowledge on all string instruments. The particular university in which this survey was administered required only one semester of either upper or lower string methods of its music education majors. Participants also indicated a general feeling of certainty that they could not teach strings.

While the qualitative analysis was useful in eliciting flexible responses, Mishra’s study opens up more questions than it answers. One particular issue to be resolved is the feeling among non-string teachers regarding their comfort level in teaching a full string
program. This appears to be a wide-spread attitude, and it remains to be determined how this attitude can be changed, a question that the present study attempts to answer.

A similar study, “Status, training, and attitudes of school orchestra directors from non-string music education background” by Robert Jenkins (1995) assessed what makes successful string teachers, and their attitudes toward their string teacher training as well as their current string teaching situation in order to improve the national shortage of school string orchestra teachers. Jenkin’s study utilized a survey questionnaire with questions regarding subjects’ background and opinion of their string training in their undergraduate education, their current teaching situation, and how both string teachers and non-string teachers felt about teaching strings.

The subject population consisted of 1,000 randomly selected members of the National String Orchestra Association (NSOA), representing a wide cross-section of string and non-string teachers across the United States. Jenkins found that of the 465 (n=465) string teachers that responded, 346 had a string background and 119 did not. Of the 119 teachers with non-string backgrounds, all indicated that their greatest lack of knowledge in their first year of teaching strings consisted of vibrato, shifting, purchasing instruments, string method books, and getting to know young orchestra literature. While this topic is similar to the current research, it does not address how these new non-string teachers actually approach these first-year teaching deficiencies, nor does it examine the opinions of the string professors who are in charge of training non-string teachers to teach strings in music colleges and universities.

The purpose of Katie McCormick’s 2008 study titled, “Perception differences of string-trained and non-string trained music educators who teach string in Iowa and
Nebraska", is similar to the present study in that it surveyed the perceptions of string-trained compared to non-string teachers by asking its subjects questions regarding their satisfaction with the training they received to become a string teacher, whether they felt the need to supplement their training with additional teacher assistance, and whether they felt competent as string teachers. An online survey questionnaire was sent to 70 string teachers in Nebraska and 108 string teachers in Iowa who taught strings in the 2007-2008 school year. An overall return rate of 58% was achieved. The results of this survey found that 67.68% of the respondents were string-trained teachers (teachers who had received extensive previous string training) and 32.32% were non string-trained teachers (teachers who had not received extensive previous string training). When asked about their string teacher training, 40.63% of the total of non string trained teachers found their string methods course to be of moderate value, 9.38% found it to be of little value, and 12.50% found it to be of no value to their current teaching situation. Responses regarding where and how non-string teachers received additional help indicated that conversations with colleagues (84.38%) and on the job training through their own ingenuity (93.75%) provided the most assistance to non string-trained teachers. Only 34.33% of the same subject group reported string methods class in their undergraduate training as contributing to their success as string teachers.

Survey questions also examined the level of competency between string and non-string teachers on string instruments. In general, both string and non-string teachers reported little to moderate confidence on the cello and bass, but string trained teacher were more confident than non string-trained teachers on the violin and viola.
Finally, when reporting on their confidence in demonstrating rehearsal technique for beginning strings, the majority of string-trained teachers were mostly confident (37.31%) to completely confident (16.42%), while non string-trained teachers who were mostly confident or completely confident were 6.25% and 15.63%, respectively. The data reported indicate similar levels of confidence between string and non string-trained teachers in demonstrating rehearsal technique to intermediate and advanced string classes.

While the data are extremely important to the current attitude of string teachers compared with non-string teachers toward teaching strings, it is limited to the subject group of string teachers in Nebraska and Iowa. The survey did not allow for respondents to elaborate on their responses to provide more in-depth insight into the topic, and the study lacked a triangulation of data to support its findings.

The purpose of Allard's 1992 study, "Comparison of string specialists and non-string specialists teaching elementary beginning string music" published in the American String Teacher was to compare the effectiveness of string and non-string teachers in three areas: teacher time use, student attentiveness, and ensemble performance quality. In order to eliminate any possible prior influences over the students' skills, 12 elementary string teachers and nine elementary non-string teachers were selected to participate in this study based on their responses to a survey questionnaire. Videotapes of both string and non-string teacher's elementary string classes were assessed and measured according to established procedures from previous studies such as intervallic observation and ex post facto analysis of rehearsal tapes with a stop watch. Carefully selected judges observed
short 2 minute videotaped performances from each string class and recorded their assessments on a "performance quality assessment chart".

Results indicated that there was no significant difference between string and non-string teachers in class time use such as performance time, non-performance time, preparation time, tuning time, music organization time, announcement time, and performance teaching time. Results also indicated that there was no difference in off-task behavior during performance and non-performance intervals. However, it was found that there was a difference in the quality of the ensemble performances between the string and non-string teacher groups.

Perhaps one element that most closely relates Allard's study in the current research is the marginally significant correlation found between the amount of training teachers received and the quality of their performing ensembles. In the questionnaire, teachers were asked, among other items, the extent of their string training, whether it was through private study, or the completion of a string methods courses in college. Allard found that string teachers had more time accumulated with private string study, string methods courses, string pedagogy courses, applied string instruction, and overall string music instruction than non-string teachers. Their ensembles also received a higher performance quality rating from the selected judges. Although Allard investigated many differences between string and non-string specialists, he did not examine any causal relationship between their training and their ensemble performance quality. The research also did not address the subjects' personal opinions or approaches toward teaching strings.

Content and approach of string professors toward non-string teachers in their string methods classes
According to the literature found on the American String Teachers Association website, members of the Collegiate Roundtable of the American String Teachers Association (ASTA-CRT) recognize the exceptional expectations of string professors responsible for teacher preparation in modern colleges and universities as compared to other music college professors (wind, percussion, vocal, choral) due to the current shortage of string teachers. In a discussion regarding the promotion and tenure of string professors, roundtable members noted that “Music education string specialists are in relatively greater demand to assist non-string-playing string and orchestra teachers in the school through on-site and in-service clinics and workshops” (para. 5). While a number of studies have investigated the content and approach of string professors toward their string methods courses, no research has been found to address string professors’ response to non-string teachers in their string methods courses.

In summary, there is a need for a study to address questions regarding how effectively first-year teaching assistance can improve the comfort level of non-string teachers teaching strings, the approach of string professors toward non-string students in their string methods classes, and the attitude of non-string teachers compared with string teachers toward their string methods classes.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research investigates the issues of non-string teachers teaching strings in relation to string players teaching strings in secondary schools across Nevada. A review of string education history revealed that while student participation in string programs across America has increased, the number of string teachers has not increased (Gillespie & Hamann, 1998). In order to counter act the lack of string teachers and maintain string programs in secondary schools, many teachers with non-string backgrounds and possibly inadequate string training have been hired to teach strings. The preparation of non-string teachers must be examined to make certain that string students are receiving the highest quality education possible. Two methods were used to gather information on the issues of non-string teachers teaching strings. The first method was the distribution of a survey to gather data about string methods courses in the participants’ music education training curriculum as well as non-string teachers’ attitude and approach to specific string issues in their first year teaching strings.

Survey

Subjects

Subjects chosen for the survey portion of this study were current secondary string teachers in Nevada. Two sources were used to identify all secondary schools in Nevada.
The *Nevada Public Schools 2007-2008* list and the *Nevada Private/Non-Public Schools 2007-2008* list were both published by The Nevada Department of Education. The lists were retrieved on April 30th, 2008 from the Nevada Department of Education website and used to obtain the addresses of all Nevada secondary schools. The state of Nevada was chosen because it contains a county that has been listed by the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM) Foundation as one of the “100 Best Communities for Music Education”, giving a strong indication of the quality of music education in part of the state. The NAMM Foundation bases its prestigious award on surveys taken by schools across the country that represent a commitment to quality in their music education programs. The option to reply was completely voluntary for all subjects who received the survey.

The surveys were addressed to the school orchestra director and mailed on May 23rd, 2008. Each participant received a cover letter (Appendix A) stating the purpose of the research and a survey (Appendix B). Included with each survey and letter was a return envelope coded to indicate a return rate.

The survey was developed by the researcher in response to the questions asked in the current study as well as the researcher’s personal experience as a non-string teacher teaching strings. The survey questionnaire contained four sections requiring both illustrative and nominal answers. The intent was to reveal any connections and/or relationships between the training of the advanced string teacher compared with the non-string teacher, as well as any relationship between the non-string teacher’s training and first-year assistance they may have received, and the level of difficulty experienced during their first year of teaching strings.
Pilot Test

A pilot test of the survey was conducted on April 15, 2008 to ensure the clarity of the purpose and questions contained within. The pilot survey was administered to three current secondary string teachers, two of whom were string-trained and one who was non-string trained. This ratio of string teachers to non-string teachers is similar to the ratio of subjects in the actual survey. The pilot survey subjects were chosen because of their status as current secondary string teachers in Nevada. Although the number of subjects polled in the pilot survey was small, there was concern that conducting the pilot survey with any more subjects would curtail the number of possible subjects for the official survey implementation. Participants in the pilot study were given a copy of the pilot survey with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the research, and were instructed to take note of any unclear questions. All subjects returned a completed survey response and improvements to the study were duly noted and made. Survey question 8 ("Which string pedagogy text did your string methods class require?") was added to allow for more clarity regarding string methods class experiences. The current research's definition of "string methods class" was also included.

Survey Design

In the survey mailed to the subjects for the current study, the first section, "Background", inquired about the respondent's music educational background, whether they held a music education degree, from which college or university they received their
undergraduate degree, and how many years they had taught strings. This section helped to indicate whether the subject was a certified string teacher and whether they had at least one year of experience teaching strings. The current research is reliant on data gathered from teachers with experience in a string methods class and string teaching experience.

The second section, “Undergraduate String Methods Class,” asked questions regarding the subject’s undergraduate string methods class(s) including which stringed instruments were taught, how much time was spent on each instrument, whether the respondent felt the time spent on the instruments was long enough, peer teaching experiences, who taught the methods class, use of textbooks and/or supplemental materials, string pedagogy texts, and the applicability of the skills learned in the string methods class to the first year teaching strings. These questions were intended to examine the type and level of string training experience in the participant’s music education. Two respondents who did not take a string methods class were excluded from the study because they did not have the necessary background to answer questions regarding undergraduate string methods classes. At the end of this section respondents were asked to indicate any improvements they would suggest to their undergraduate string methods class. This question was included to ensure that information resulting from the respondent’s personal teaching experience could be included or emphasized more.

The third section of the survey titled, “Teaching Strings” was exclusive to non-string teachers teaching strings in order to investigate the level of difficulty non-string teachers felt when addressing issues unique to string education. A Likert scale ranging from 1 = ‘not at all’ to 5 = ‘very much’ and NA = ‘not applicable’ was provided to reflect a wide
range of non-string teacher opinions on four subjects titled, “Instrumental Issues”, “Music Interpretation issues”, “String Ensemble Issues”, and “String Literature Issues”.

The fourth section, “First Year Teaching Assistance”, examined what level and what type of support, if any, the respondent received during their first year of teaching strings.

Research Procedures

Several measures were taken to guarantee the highest rate of return possible for the survey. The survey instrument and cover letter were printed on colored paper to enhance their face value, and the survey questionnaire did not exceed more than two pages. The survey questions were kept short and concise and were organized into common subheadings. Every survey packet contained a postage-paid return envelope which was assigned a code number in order to record the schools that returned a completed survey. Based on this coding, a second survey printed on a different color paper, a cover letter with different content (Appendix C) and a postage-paid return envelope was mailed to the school that had not responded to the first mailing. Out of the 284 surveys sent out, 65 (n = 65) were returned. A possible effect of the low response rate could be related to the timing of the survey mailing. The first group of surveys was mailed on May 23, 2008, very close to the end of the school year and a busy time for string teachers preparing for summer.

Results were entered into a spreadsheet using the software from Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 15) because of the system’s ability to analyze data in multi-dimensions. Some difficulties and inconsistencies in the subjects’ responses were discovered during the data entry. These problems appeared to be caused by misunderstood directions or unanswered questions (missing data). These responses were
carefully noted by the researcher and addressed as logically as possible. On survey question 3 in Section II, many respondents did not specify if the time spent on each string instrument was weeks, months, or semesters. The researcher assumed that when not specified, most respondents had reported their time in weeks. For example, survey # 4 responded with the number “8” for violin and viola combined, and the number “4” for both the cello and the bass. When added up, these numbers equal 16. Since a typical semester is 16 weeks long, it was logical to assume the respondent meant weeks. Of the 65 surveys returned, two were from string teachers with no music education degree, two were from teachers who had not taken string methods classes in their undergraduate training, and one was from a teacher who did not teach strings. These surveys were removed because their information was not relevant to the current research, leaving a final total of n=60.

A database was created for the survey’s illustrative questions. These data were sorted and categorized for each individualized question on order to determine the number of common responses and any relationships between these answers and the interview answers was duly noted.

Interviews

Subjects chosen for the interview portion of this study consisted of two non-string teachers teaching strings in Nevada; public school teacher A and B, and two music college professors; string professor A and B, who coordinate and/or teach students to become string teachers. The non-string teachers each had more than one year of string-teaching experience and were able to provide their perspective on how they approached different aspects of string education without having a strong string background. These
subjects were not so far removed from memories of their undergraduate training. The non-string teachers were chosen based on the level of success with their string program. For the purposes of this study, “success” was defined by their ensembles having received a rating of “Superior” or “Excellent” in a majority of their performances at district orchestra festivals. Interviews were conducted separately, face-to-face on July 17, 2008 at a location convenient to the subject and audio recorded by the researcher. Each interview required approximately 30 minutes to complete. A full transcript was made of each interview (Appendix D and E) and sent to each respective interview subject for their approval. The interview subjects were given an opportunity to correct any discrepancies or misperceptions. Common answers between each interview were noted.

The string professors interviewed for this study were chosen based on their responsibility for teaching a string methods class and strong recommendations from other string pedagogues in this field of work. Each professor had numerous years of experience and were able to provide in-depth insight into the content and approaches utilized by successful string professors in this field. String professor A was interviewed by phone and audio recorded on July 24, 2008, and string professor B was interviewed through email on August 8, 2008. A full transcript was made of each interview (Appendix F and G) and sent to the interview subjects for their approval before publishing. Common answers between each interview were noted.

Interview questions were developed based on the results of the surveys to gather more in-depth information. The interview questions for the non-string teachers currently teaching strings in Nevada were designed to further illustrate a successful non-string teacher’s string training, preparation, and first-year experiences as well as to discover
how effectively they were able to transition from their primary non-stringed instrument to teaching stringed instruments. Interview questions for the music college and university professors responsible for string teacher training were designed to obtain a personal account of the professors’ content and approach to their string methods course curriculums as well as their perspective and recommendations regarding training non-string teachers to teach strings.

Content Validity

The content for the survey questionnaire was developed by the researcher in response to the questions asked in the current study and the researcher’s personal experience as a non-string teacher teaching strings. The pilot study was also utilized to determine appropriate and relevant content.

Written consent forms were not used for either the pilot test or the survey as the act of voluntarily responding was considered an adequate form of consent. The current study was reviewed and approved by the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Institutional Review Board and the Clark County School District Research Review Board.

External Validity

Because of the small number of subjects in the survey portion of this study (n=60), it is cautioned that results may not be generalized to the larger portion of American secondary teachers with and without string backgrounds. However, the survey subjects were considered to be similar to string teachers from around the country and therefore it is conjectured that secondary string teachers and string teacher training music colleges and universities in general, might benefit from the findings of this study.
Reliability

Due to the qualitative nature of part of the survey and the interviews used in this study, a low level of reliability is acceptable because the data were analyzed and reported based on the group's average response. However, the triangulation of data confirming the quantitative survey responses with the interview responses, and the implementation of the pilot survey prior to the study enhance the reliability of this study. Results of this data are listed in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION

Of 284 surveys sent to current string teachers in Nevada, a total of 65 were returned. A total of three surveys of the original number sent out were returned because the schools were no longer open. Of the 65 surveys returned, two were from string teachers who did not hold a music education degree, two were from teachers who had not taken string methods classes in their undergraduate training, and one was from a teacher who did not teach strings. Because of the nature of the questions contained in the survey, the decision was made to report only responses from teachers who had a degree in music education and had completed a string methods class as part of their music education degree requirement. Five surveys were removed because their information was not relevant to the current research, leaving a total number of 60 viable surveys. Out of these 60 surveys, 35 were from teachers with a string background, and 25 were from teachers with a non-string background. The results of the 60 surveys were entered, compared, and analyzed in a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) database. The results of this analysis follow.

Section I – Background

Survey questions 1 and 3 in Section I were designed to gather general background information about each participant, such as whether they hold a music education degree and the number of years they have taught strings. After the four surveys from the teachers
who did not hold a music education degree or had not taken a string methods class in the under-graduate training were eliminated, the rate of respondents with a music education degree was 100% (n=60). Results for the number of years teaching strings teachers with a string background had compared with those with a non-string background are listed in Figure 1. It was found that a majority of both string and non-string respondents have taught string for 10 years or more. The number of non-string teachers who have taught between one and three years at 34.6% indicates an increase in the number of new non-string teachers.

Figure 1 (n=60)

Survey Question: How many years have you taught strings?

Question 2, inquiring where the participant’s undergraduate degree was obtained, revealed a wide cross section of teachers from across the country who currently teach in Nevada. Results are listed in Table 1.
Table 1 (n=60)

Survey Question: *At which college/university did you complete your undergraduate music studies?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College/University</th>
<th># of respondents attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University of Nevada, Las Vegas</td>
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<td>Loyola University (Louisiana)</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Nevada, Reno</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brigham Young University (Utah)</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee</td>
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<td>Grand Valley State University (Michigan)</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Portland</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baylor University (Texas)</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Arizona</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Utah State College</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graceland College (Iowa)</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Francisco State University (California)</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Louisville (Kentucky)</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Northern Colorado</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baldwin – Wallace College (Ohio)</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Utah</td>
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<tr>
<td>California State, Northridge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Edinboro State College (Pennsylvania)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millikin College (Illinois)</td>
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<tr>
<td>St. Olaf College (Minnesota)</td>
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<td>Gettysburg College (Pennsylvania)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Oklahoma City University</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>California State University, Long Beach</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section II - Undergraduate String Methods Class

Questions 1, 2, and 5 in Section II were designed to gather information on specific aspects of the participant's string methods class, such as whether the class was required, if the participant learned techniques on all the string instruments, and if the class curriculum included "peer teaching". A large majority of both string (97.1%) and non-string (81.5%) teachers responded that string methods class was a required part of their music education curriculum. While a large percentage of string (82.9%) and non-string (61.5%) teachers reported learning techniques on all string instruments, it is important to note that 38.5% of non-string teachers did not learn how to play all of the string instruments as compared to only 17.1% of the string teachers. The percentage of respondents who participated in peer teaching is greater in the string teacher group (62.9%) as compared to the non-string teacher group (46.2%). Responses to these survey questions are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 (n=60)

Survey Questions: Were you required to take string methods class in your undergraduate music education curriculum? Did you learn techniques on all string orchestra instruments? Did you participate in "Peer teaching" during the course of the class?
Question 3 in Section II focused on the amount of time spent learning each instrument in string methods class. With the exception of the viola, string teachers spent more weeks on each instrument than did non-string teachers. The largest discrepancy was found between the 11.7 weeks string teachers spent receiving instruction on the bass as compared with the 6.2 weeks non-string teachers spent receiving instruction on the bass. Results are displayed in Figure 3.

Figure 3 (n=60)

Survey Question: How many weeks were spent learning each instrument?
Question 4 was designed to investigate the participant’s perception on the length of time spent learning string instruments. Results listed in Figure 4 indicate that while a larger number of both groups felt the time spent was too short, non-string teachers reported a slightly higher number of 57.7%, while teachers with a string background reported a slightly lower number of 54.5%. No teachers felt the time spent in string methods course was too long.

Figure 4 (n=60)

*Survey Question: In your opinion, do you feel the time spent learning these instruments was too long, too short, or just right?*

![Bar chart showing survey results for string and non-string teachers.](chart)

Participants were asked who taught their string methods class for survey question 6. A majority of both string and non-string teachers reported that their string methods class had been taught by a string professor. Sixty-four percent of non-string teachers reported having string professor instructors, while 85.7% of string teachers experienced the same instruction. Non-string teachers had more graduate student and “other” instruction in their string methods class. Some “other” written responses indicated...
professional violinists, current public school teachers, and a combination of both a string professor and a graduate student had taught their string methods class. Results are shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5 (n=60)

Survey Question: Who taught your string methods class?
Survey question 7 asked participants what type of text their string methods class used. A large majority of non-string teachers (40%) used the Muller-Rusch text while a large majority of string teachers (40%) used "other" texts. Written "other" responses included, All for Strings, texts by Elizabeth Green, Suzuki, and Applebaum, an unnamed college string methods text, and various sheet music. A number of respondents wrote that they could not remember. A number of teachers responded that they used multiple texts. Results are displayed in Figure 6.

Figure 6 (n=60)

*Survey Question: What type of student text did your string methods class utilize?*

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The results of question 8 show that at 69%, more string teachers did not use a string pedagogy text in their string methods class as compared to 54.5% of non-string teachers. However, the percentage of both string and non-string teachers who did not use
a string pedagogy text in their string methods class is higher than in any other category. Responses indicating “other” replied that they didn’t remember, or had received handouts from the instructor. Results are displayed in Figure 7.

Figure 7 (n=60)

Survey Question: Which string pedagogy text did your string methods class require?

![Bar chart showing the distribution of string pedagogy texts required in string methods classes.]

Teachers were asked whether or not they felt their string methods class was applicable to their first year of teaching strings in the first part of Question 9. Responses are listed in Figure 8. Results show an overwhelming percentage (74.2%) of string teachers felt their string methods class was applicable to their first year. While the percentage of non-string teachers who teach strings that felt their string methods class was applicable is lower (60.9%), it is important to note that the percentage of those who did not think it was applicable (30.4%) is higher than that of the teachers with a string background (16.1%). Some teachers responded that they felt certain parts of their string
methods class were applicable while some were not and answered ‘Both’ to the survey question.

Figure 8 (n=60)

Survey Questions: Did you find the skills learned in your string methods class applicable to your first year of teaching strings?

The second part of Question 9 was a free response question that asked teachers to examine the applicability of the string methods course to their first year of teaching strings in greater depth. Question 10 was also a free response question that asked teachers to list any suggestions they might make to their string methods course. A qualitative content analysis ascertained that there were many similar responses to both illustrative survey questions 9 and 10 and therefore the decision was made by the researcher to combine the responses. These responses were separated by “string” and “non-string” responses. Responses were then categorized by themes and are listed below. Complete transcriptions of these responses are listed in Appendix H.
Non-String Teacher Responses

Responses from teachers without a background in strings stated they gained enough information from string methods classes to get them at least started in their first year of teaching strings. Responses such as, “I had the basic skills needed to start the year – I grew with the students” and “It was concentrated to help us through the first year” illustrate how some participants were able to rely on their string methods class knowledge to teach strings. Other responses such as, “Good basic foundation but would have loved more” and “Got me started until I could learn” demonstrate some satisfaction with string methods classes, but still a need for further education to continue teaching strings.

A number of non-string teacher responses reflect a need for longer string methods classes. Responses such as, “More time. Maybe more credit hours” and “Play all instruments, have it more than 1 semester” suggest that extending the length of the string methods class would improve the participants’ level of comfort entering their first string-teaching experience.

Many non-string teacher responses imply a need for more advanced string instruction in the string methods classes. One participant states, “The class needed to be about more than just how to start a string student off. I started teaching HS [high school] orchestra this year with no knowledge of shifting or advanced bowing, and had to figure out how to teach these things on my own without being able to model or demonstrate myself (I am a saxophone player)”. Another participant comments, “There was no advanced string study, no technique or literature beyond the second year level”. Both responses suggest
string methods classes could assist non-string teachers teaching strings by incorporating higher-level string techniques into the class curriculum.

*String Teacher Responses*

Responses from teachers with a background in strings state that skills they learned in string methods classes filled in the gaps of participant’s overall string knowledge. One respondent stated that their string methods class “taught me the basic on cello and bass”. Another participant claims, “Yes. I needed the experience on bass and viola”. Still another participant expresses a deficit of knowledge prior to the string methods course: “I didn’t know how to even hold a cello or bass correctly”. Other responses regarding applicable knowledge gained from string methods class describe participants’ approach to string classroom management: “I use a drill approach that was also used in the methods class”. Another participant describes learning “Classroom management by maintaining control and having students play constantly”.

Some participants express concern that the string methods class did not prepare them for teaching in a real-life string classroom. Such responses include comments related to teaching a large mixed string class: “I needed more on group teaching these [skills], not just individual”. Another participant states, “It didn’t show how to teach a string class”. Several participants point out the age difference between peer teaching and teaching in the actual string classroom: “Teaching teenagers and teaching college students is totally different”. Another participant desires more knowledge on teaching the instruments: “I wish we focused more on how to teach the instruments rather than learning how to play only”.

38
String methods class is found to be too short by many string teachers: “I think music majors intending to teach string should have at least 2 semesters of undergrad. string methods classes – 1 semester just isn’t enough”. Another participant agrees, stating, “Make them [string methods classes] longer if possible. One semester was not enough”.

Section III – Teaching Strings

Sections III and IV were limited to participants described as non-string teachers currently teaching strings (n=25). Section III focused on information about the participant’s level of difficulty managing string class concerns such as instrumental issues, music interpretation issues, string ensemble issues, and string literature issues during their first year teaching strings. A Likert rating system was used ranging from 1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = somewhat, 4 = quite a bit, 5 = very much, and NA = not applicable.
**Instrumental Issues**

Instrumental issues included “Instrument Hold”, “Bow Hold”, “Tuning”, “Vibrato”, and “Instrumental Repair”. Non-string teachers responded that their highest level of difficulty in regards to instrumental issues was vibrato. The instrumental issue with the least amount of difficulty was found to be instrument repair. Teachers’ opinion toward the difficulty of tuning seemed evenly distributed across the levels of difficulty, while bow hold and instrument hold ranked between primarily between “somewhat” and “a little” level of difficulty. The results are shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9 (n=25)

**Instrumental Issues**

![Graph showing the distribution of difficulty levels for different instrumental issues.](image)

**Music Interpretation Issues**

In this section, music interpretation issues included “Articulation”, “Dynamics”, “Bowings”, “Fingerings”, and “Tone”. It was found that the music interpretation issue with the highest level of difficulty was fingerings. Tone and bowings ranked as the next more difficult music interpretation issues, with results dispersed mostly between “a little”
and “somewhat”. The least difficult issue reported in this section was articulation and dynamics. Results are displayed in Figure 10.

Figure 10 (n=25)

*Music Interpretation Issues*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Somewhat</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
<th>Very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamics</td>
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<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowings</td>
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<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fingerings</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**String Ensemble Issues**

String ensemble issues included “Intonation”, “Balance”, “Blend”, “Balanced Instrumentation”, and “Seating Arrangement”. Non-string teachers encountered a moderate degree of difficulty with intonation, balance, blend, and balanced instrumentation issues in their first year teaching strings. Teachers reported the least amount of difficulties with seating arrangement. Results are shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11 (n=25)

**String Ensemble Issues**
String Literature Issues

When selecting literature in their first year teaching strings, non-string teachers responded that they had a little to no difficulty choosing literature appropriate to the level of their string programs. Selecting appropriate method books was also reported to be low in their level of difficulty. Non-string teachers responded that choosing quality literature for their string programs was slightly more challenging than selecting level-appropriate music or method books. Results are displayed in Figure 12.

Figure 12 (n=25)

String Literature Issues
Section IV – First Year String Teaching Assistance

In Section IV, questions 1, 2, and 3 were designed to gather information about the participant’s first-year teacher assistance from mentors, other string teachers, and workshops/in-services. Question 1 asked teachers to report whether they had been assigned a music mentor during their first year teaching strings. While 32% responded they had worked with a mentor, more than twice that amount, 68%, responded that they did not have this experience. Of those teachers who were assigned a mentor, 28% of them reported the mentor was a string player and those teachers who had a music mentor mostly met on a monthly basis, as reported in Figure 13.

Figure 13 (n=25)

Survey Question: How often did you communicate with your music mentor?
At 92%, an overwhelming majority of teachers responded that they sought assistance from other string teachers in their school district during their first year teaching strings in response to question 2 of this section. A smaller percentage, but still a large number of participants, 68%, also replied that they participated in string workshops or in-service clinics in their first year in response to question 3 of this section. Results are shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14 (n=25)

Survey Questions: Did you ever seek assistance from other string teachers in your district during your first year of string teaching? During your first year of teaching strings, did you participate in string workshops or in-service clinics?
First Year String Support

A Likert scale similar to that in Section III was used to rate how helpful mentors, other string teachers, workshops/in-services, under-graduate string methods courses and string pedagogy literature were to the participant's first year teaching strings at the end of Section IV. A vast majority of non-string teachers rated their observation of successful string teachers as most influential in their first year teaching strings. String workshops/in-service clinics were found to play a moderate role. Undergraduate string methods classes were only somewhat to a little effective in teachers' first year. A vast majority of non-string teachers responded that they did not have the help of a mentor teacher.

Results are displayed in Figure 15.

Figure 15 (n=25)

First Year String Support
Public School Teacher Interviews

Two teachers consistently receiving marks of “Superior” or “Excellent” at district orchestra festivals who do not have a string background were chosen for part of this study. It was important to the study that these teachers have between 2 and 4 years between their string methods course in their undergraduate studies and their string teaching position to increase the likelihood of them being able to adequately recall details of their string methods experience.

Teacher A

Teacher A was a brass player throughout high school and college. He received his first string experience in high school where he played his brass instrument in the school symphony orchestra. It was then that he first became interested in teaching strings, despite his band background. Teacher A pursued his music education degree and fulfilled the required single semester string methods course and completed his student teaching with a middle school orchestra master teacher. He received his Bachelor of Music Education degree in 2005 and has been teaching high school orchestra for three years.

Teacher B

Teacher B, who received his undergraduate degree in Music Education in 2006, was a woodwind player throughout high school and college and has taught high school orchestra for two years. He fulfilled the required single semester string methods course in his undergraduate Music Education program. Teacher B received his first string teaching experience when he was a student teacher with a master high school teacher whose responsibilities including teaching sections of both band and orchestra.
Both interviews were held in a convenient location, audio-recorded, and transcribed (Appendix D and E). Analysis of these responses is listed as follows:

*Interview Questions*

1. **Why did you decide to take a string job instead of band?**

Both teachers gave very different responses. Teacher A was inspired by the variety of sounds heard at a New York Philharmonic performance in high school and decided to join his school’s symphony orchestra as a brass player. Teacher B accepted a string position because it was the first job offer he received immediately following his college graduation.

2. **Have you ever taught band?**

Teacher A taught one class of band in his third year of teaching. Teacher B never taught a band class.

3. **Who taught your string methods course in college?**

Both teachers had very different experiences in their string methods courses. Teacher A was taught by an actual string professor at the college, while Teacher B was taught by a violin performer who had little to no experience teaching college-level string methods courses.

4. **How much time was spent learning each instrument in your string methods course?**

Teacher A and Teacher B both took the required single semester of string methods class in their undergraduate curriculum. Within that course, both teachers spent a few weeks on each instrument, although Teacher B did not receive any hands-on instruction on the bass.
5. What kind of materials were used by your string methods instructor to teach the string methods course?

Teacher A received handouts that the instructor had created himself, as well as from other collegiate sources. Teacher B recalled working with the ‘Strictly Strings’ series and handouts provided by the instructor.

6. Did you peer teach in your string methods course?

Teacher A remembered a small amount of peer teaching, while Teacher B did not participate in any peer teaching.

7. As a band student, did you take your string methods course seriously?

Both teachers approached their string classes very differently. Teacher A was intending to teach strings and therefore took the course very seriously. However, Teacher B was not interested in teaching strings at the time of his string methods course and simply took the course because it was required of all music education majors at his college.

8. What was the most helpful thing you learned in your string methods course?

Teacher A found that patience was the most important skill he attained. He was aware that as a non-string student learning strings for the first time in this course, his experiences would be very similar to those of the students he would someday teach. Teacher B found the most helpful skill he learned was how to tune a stringed instrument.

9. Do you think you could have taught your string classes based solely on what you learned from your string methods course?

Teacher A knew that the 16 weeks spent in string methods class was simply not
enough time to learn everything necessary to become a successful string teacher, but did attribute his paradigm shift regarding misconceptions toward strings to this course. He claimed this course was simply an “introduction to each variable or point of orchestra”. Teacher B felt it was unlikely that he would have become a successful string teacher if he had only the string methods class experience.

10. How did you approach specific string issues in your first year of teaching?

Teacher A attributed his knowledge of bowing, articulation, and tuning to his string colleagues as something that must be felt to be understood. He learned orchestral balance and blend through his experiences playing with the symphony orchestra in high school and college. Instrument repair was something with which Teacher A never had extensive experience, and simply asked questions when a repair issue arose. Teacher B taught bowing by selecting excerpts from the pieces his orchestra was practicing to reinforce specific concepts. He attempted to have his students sing articulations to understand better how to perform them and worked on having his students over-exaggerate their dynamics to avoid sounding monotone. Teacher B struggled with balance because he was unable to recruit and retain the proper number of low strings but found it easier to work with only five different string sections rather than numerous different woodwind, brass, and percussion sections as in a band. In his approach to tuning, Teacher B allowed his advanced students to tune themselves, but was dissatisfied with their ability to tune. Teacher B found that repairing string instruments was fairly basic and hasn’t had many difficulties with instrument repair.
11. What was the hardest thing you encountered in your first year of teaching strings?

Both teachers agreed that intonation was the most difficult concept to teach. Teacher A explained his difficulty transitioning from brass instruments where most of the intonation was corrected by pushing buttons or adjusting slides, embouchure and air to trying to learn how to make adjustments on string instruments. Teacher B also had difficulty hearing intonation problems in his string ensembles because his ear was not trained to listen to stringed instruments.

12. What was the easiest thing you encountered in your first year of teaching strings?

Teacher A found teaching general music principles (such as dynamics, blend, and articulation) were the easiest concepts to transfer from band to strings. Teacher B expressed that nothing was easy to teach in his first year.

13. Did you incorporate any band techniques into your string teaching?

Both teachers transferred rhythmic concepts influenced by their band background in their string teaching. Teacher A experimented with subdivision using the “Breath Impulse Method” (pulsing a breath on the subdivision of each beat). Teacher B incorporated counting and singing in his string classes because he had been exposed to these techniques in his band experiences. He also placed heavy emphasis on rhythm-reading in his string rehearsals, something he believes was influenced by his band background.

14. What kind of method books did you use?

Teacher A used Essential Elements for String 2000 for a short time but changed to
creating his own exercises in Finale to allow for more differentiated instruction. Teacher B wasn’t very familiar with any method books and felt many other high schools string programs didn’t use method books either.

15. **How did you become familiar with string literature?**

Both teachers utilized their colleagues for suggestions on selecting string literature. Teacher A found that he obtained his knowledge for string literature almost exclusively from veteran string teachers. Teacher B received suggestions from his master teacher and visited veteran teachers in the district to see what they were programming for their string classes.

16. **What kind of in-services and workshops did you attend during your first year?**

Both teachers attended numerous training activities including a Dr. Tim Lautzenheimer workshop and a Dean Angeles in-service.

17. **Were you assigned a string mentor your first year?**

Neither teacher was not assigned a specific mentor but both took it upon themselves to establish relationships with veteran teachers by asking questions and communicating through email, phone conversations, and observations.

18. **Have you ever taken lessons on a string instrument?**

Neither teacher had taken private lessons but both expressed a need and desire to do so in the near future.

19. **Do you have any suggestions for first-year non-string teachers teaching strings?**

Teacher A suggested seeking out successful teachers in inner-city schools and
asking lots of questions. Teacher A also recommended new non-string teachers use technology as a tool to help them manage their string program as well as share information through training material templates or midi files. Teacher B recommends that new non-string teachers should not be afraid of teaching strings because, compared to band, the literature selection is better, and four instruments are easier to manage than the multiple varieties in band.

String Professor Interviews

Two college string professors considered highly knowledgeable in string pedagogy, published within their field, and responsible for training string teachers were chosen for the second portion of this study. The interview with string professor A was held over the phone and the interview with string professor B was completed through email correspondence. Both interviews were transcribed (Appendix F and G). Analysis of these responses is listed as follows:

String Professor A

Professor A received her master’s degree in flute performance. However, she knew she wanted to be a string teacher. She obtained a K-12 general instrumental certification as well as a doctoral degree in Music Education and taught some band but mostly orchestra in public schools for 12 years. Her current responsibilities include Professor of String Pedagogy, director of the Master’s Degree in String Development and Associate Director of the School of Music at a major university.

Professor B

Professor B has been a music professor for 24 years and is currently responsible for teacher training at a major music university. He has taught in both public and private
school at all levels prior to teaching at the university level and is widely published in the string pedagogy field.

*Interview Questions*

1. **Do you have a string methods class at your university? If so, who is in charge of teaching it?**

Both professors are responsible for a string-teacher training courses within their university. Professor A responded that the music education faculty at her university are responsible for teaching the instrumental methods courses, but Professor A will occasionally team-teach with these teachers who have students that are on their way to becoming string teachers. Professor A is also in charge of a ‘string fundamentals’ course which develops skills on high strings one semester and low strings the next semester. This course is intended mostly for music education instrumental majors learning string technique. Professor B teaches one section of a string methods course, and doctoral students in string music education teach a second section by observing Professor B in the morning, then using his lesson plans will imitate the same lesson as they teach their own string methods class in the afternoon.

2. **Is string methods class a requirement for all instrumental music education majors at your school?**

Both professors responded that a string methods course was required in the music education program at their school. Professor A explained that another course available to music education majors is string pedagogy, but due to their already heavy required course load this class is not mandatory.
3. **What is the length in time (semesters) of your string methods class?**

The music education program at Professor A’s university requires one semester of high strings and one semester on low strings. Professor B’s university is on the 10-week quarter system where classes meet four days a week. All undergraduate instrumental music education majors are required to take two quarters of string methods class which are divided into five weeks on each of the four stringed instruments. Professor B added that there is an elective quarter class for students to receive additional instruction.

4. **What is your response to current string teachers who claim their string methods course in undergraduate school was not long enough to learn the skills they thought were necessary in order to get through their first year of teaching?**

Professor A agreed there is not enough time to include everything necessary to becoming a string teacher into string methods class because most music schools are restricted in the courses they can offer to students in the years they are in school. However, she believed there are many opportunities for non-string teachers to improve any string skills they are lacking through programs such as the National String Workshop (NSW). This program is offered during the summer to string teachers who wish to improve their skills on particular instruments. String teachers should take private lessons on stringed instruments as well as attend additional string teaching classes, according to Professor B.

5. **Is there a difference between string and non-string music education students in their attitude/approach toward your string methods class?**

Professor A responded that because of the high standards and strict requirements
of music education majors at her school, the students that are accepted into the program are serious musicians who understand a comprehensive music education program.

Professor B stated that the string education majors at his school are typically initially more interested in the course content than the non-string students, but his goal is to improve this attitude so that at the end of the string methods class the difference between string and non-string majors is indecipherable.

6. Have any non-string majors ever used any band or other non-string instrument skills or techniques in string methods class? For example, based on conversations with band teachers, they seem to use a lot of rhythm in their daily lessons, whereas string teachers use less.

Professor A stated that band method books teach rhythm reading better, or more consistently, or more quickly than do string books. She also explained that it depends on whether a teacher is teaching a stringed instrument or a wind instrument that should determine the order in which such things as rhythms are taught. Professor B did not understand the question.

7. Is there a difference in the way you or the instructor approaches string versus non-string majors in the string methods class?

Professor A empathized with non-string majors because she was once one herself, understood it was her responsibility to individualize her instruction to be sure all students, whether non-string or string, received the knowledge they needed to become successful string teachers. Professor B stated there was no difference in the way he approached non-string and string majors in his string methods class.
8. **What are the main objectives of your string methods class curriculum?**

Skill development on string instruments is the main objective of Professor A’s string methods curriculum. Professor B’s main objectives included developing the necessary string skills, knowledge, and understanding of valuable resources for teaching strings successfully in schools.

9. **Does your string methods class curriculum consist of purchasing and repairing instruments, choosing appropriate literature, large group instruction, and advanced string techniques?**

Both professors responded that they include all of these in their string methods class curriculum.

10. **What type of performance/teaching skills do you expect a music education major to possess at the end of the string methods course?**

   Professor A expected that students can produce a good, beautiful characteristic tone, be able to adjust when out of tune, understand finger patterns and hand shapes, to produce good intonation and how strings relate to each other, have a concept of how intonation is affected across the strings and from finger to finger, how to maintain a good bow hold, and the ability to compose and arrange for strings at the beginning level.

   Professor B responded in a general statement that students should possess skills that would enable them to play well through the end of a typical school string class using the first level of a method book. He also expects that students should possess some advanced playing skills including shifting, vibrato, and spiccato.

11. **What is your opinion of non-string teachers teaching strings?**

   Professor A is a strong advocate of non-string teachers teaching strings, stating
that some of the best string teachers in this country have a wind background. Professor B also supported non-string teachers teaching strings and states there are many successful teachers whose background is not in strings. Both professors emphasized that non-string teachers have to understand the responsibility of their profession and make a concentrated effort to develop any skills they are lacking to become successful string teachers.

12. How can non-string teachers become better-prepared to teach strings?  
(What are the most essential techniques/ characteristic traits/ attitudes a non-string major needs to know to be a successful string teacher?)

Professor A responded that non-string music education majors need to be enthusiastic, be a good colleague, and be responsible for both their personal and their student’s learning. Professor B responded that non-string students should attend string workshops, take private lessons on string instruments on a regular basis, and follow the competencies, skills, and attitudes established by the American String Teachers Association (ASTA) that are necessary for success in string teaching.

13. What are the most common requests or questions you receive from non-string teachers teaching in the string classroom? What are their greatest difficulties?

Professor A stated that the most common questions depend on the level being taught. In general, questions regarding rehearsal technique, personal skills on string instruments, classroom management, and strategies for tuning and being efficient are most common. Professor B stated that the most common question and the greatest difficulty for non-string teachers teaching strings is playing on the stringed instruments.
All of the survey and interview results were analyzed common themes were noted. A summary and conclusions are contained in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the data presentation, the survey and interviews were analyzed and similar results were noted. Results were then related to the research questions as stated in Chapter 1.

The data gathered in this research clearly demonstrate that there are many differences in the training of string and non-string teachers who currently teach strings in Nevada. It is conjectured that these differences contribute to a disparity in the overall attitude toward their string methods class. Data from this study also show that, despite their initial lack of string knowledge, non-string teachers have the capacity to become successful string teachers if they pursue assistance from other sources such as experienced string teachers. What is the difference in attitudes between string and non-string teachers toward their string methods class?

It appears from this research that currently there are more non-string teachers who have taught between one and three years teaching strings than string teachers who have taught between one and three years currently teaching strings in Nevada. The background questions on the survey completed by both string and non-string teachers who teach strings revealed that more non-string teachers (34.6%) have taught for one to three years than string teachers (14.3%). These results can possibly be traced back to the format of music classes in elementary schools where students are often taught music fundamentals.
on percussion and wind instruments (primarily band instruments). The interest in band continues as students are involved in pep bands, marching bands, and jazz bands up through the college and university level. High numbers of band music education graduates have no choice but to accept string teaching positions because band director positions are quickly filled.

According to the data gathered in this study, many string positions are currently being filled by non-string teachers. It is vital to the future success of string programs that a non-string teacher’s pedagogical string training is equal to a string teacher’s in its thoroughness and quality. However, based on the responses from non-string participants in this study, this is not often the case. It appears that fewer non-string teachers (81.5%) were required to take string methods class than string teachers (97.1%). Of those that were required to take this course, fewer non-string teachers (60.9%) compared to string teachers (74.2%) thought their string methods class was applicable to their first year of teaching strings.

More specifically, results indicate that fewer non-string teachers learned techniques on all of the string instruments and participated in peer teaching in their string methods class than did string teachers. Public school teacher B reported that he, “didn’t have bass methods” and “was completely clueless” about the string bass. He also did not participate in peer teaching. Public school teacher A reported a very small amount of peer teaching in his string methods class. All of these results demonstrate that non-string teachers have less preparation going into their string teaching assignments than do string teachers.

String music education majors spend more time in string methods class learning techniques on string instruments than non-string music education majors. This is
especially evident upon examination of results in which string majors spent nearly twice as much time learning techniques on the bass as did non-string majors. These results most likely suggest many string majors are upper string players and therefore spend more time learning skills on the lower strings.

Results suggest non-string teachers feel less prepared going into their string teaching assignments than do string teachers. The difference in opinion between string and non-string teachers toward the time spent learning the instruments in string methods class was very small, but it is still important to note that 57.7% of non-string teachers felt the course was too short, as compared to 54.5% of string teachers. Both public school teacher interview subjects responded that the time spent in string methods class was not enough to learn everything necessary to become a successful string teacher.

The percentage of non-string teachers who were taught by a string professor (64%) is larger than a class taught by a graduate student or other, but not by such a wide margin as the string teachers. A vast majority of string teachers (85.7%) were taught string methods by a string professor as opposed to a graduate student or other in their undergraduate music training. It is assumed that string professors are more knowledgeable and provide better instruction than a graduate student. Therefore, it is suggested that the 12% of non-string teachers who were taught by a graduate student received lower quality instruction in string methods. This is confirmed by public school teacher B who was not taught by a trained string professor and had a very negative impression of the inferior instruction he received in his string methods class.
A standard text in string methods class for non-string students is the *Muller-Rusch* series. Further research is needed to examine the decision made by string methods class instructors to include this text in their curriculum.

Based on the results of this study, there is no standard string pedagogy text required in string methods classes across the country. This may suggest that there is no standard curriculum for string teacher training in music colleges and universities.

According to the free responses, non-string teachers feel that the string methods course is a way to help them start their first year, but not necessarily make it all the way through without external assistance. String teachers express satisfaction with their string methods course in the way it fills in the gaps of their previous string knowledge. Both string and non-string teachers indicated that the knowledge gained in string methods classes isn’t always transferable to the realities of their string program such as large group instruction and advanced string techniques.

*How effective are teacher workshops, in-service clinics, and mentors in the development of non-string teacher who teach strings?*

Music mentors provide little assistance to most non-string teachers simply because they are not assigned to most non-string teachers, according to the findings of this study. Neither public school teacher interview subject had a music mentor in their first year. Of the few teachers in this study who had a music mentor, a small number of these mentors were actual string teachers with whom they met with on a monthly basis. Unfortunately, this study did not have the capacity to examine whether the non-string teachers would have been more successful in their first year of teaching string had they had a string mentor.
It was found that literature and media on string pedagogy plays a moderate role in a non-string teacher’s first year teaching strings. String workshops and in-service clinics contribute somewhat to the success of a non-string teacher’s first year teaching strings, but more research would be necessary to determine the depth and scope of these contributions. Both public school teacher interview subjects discussed the advantages of various training activities to improve the quality of their string teaching as well. Public school teacher B, in reference to string training in-services that he attended in his first year of teaching, stated, “I learned more in those two classes than I did in methods class, and I got a lot more out of it than I did my methods class”. Of his first year string training in-services, public school teacher A claimed, “That was exactly what I needed”.

One of the biggest influences on a non-string teacher’s development in their first year of teaching is the observation of and interaction with successful experienced string teachers. At 92%, an overwhelming majority of non-string survey participants, as well as both public school teacher interview subjects, responded that they sought assistance from other string teachers in their school district during their first year teaching strings. A large majority of participants also rated “Other String Teachers” and “Observation of Successful String Teachers” as most influential in their first year teaching strings. Both public school interview subjects utilized their experienced string colleagues for suggestions on selecting appropriate string literature, string-specific techniques such as articulation, bowing, and intonation.

*Which string-related issues do non-string teachers find the most challenging?*

Non-string teachers find vibrato and fingerings to be the most challenging instrumental issue of teaching strings during their first year. Both string professor
interview subjects are often asked to assist new non-string teachers who are in their first year teaching string in the field. String professor A claimed many new non-string teachers often had questions regarding their own skill on the stringed instruments. String professor B stated, “The most difficulty they [non-string teachers teaching strings] have is playing the instruments”.

What is the content and approach of string professors in music colleges and universities toward their string methods courses and students with non-string background in these courses?

Both string professor interview subjects teach a string methods course that is more extensive than the majority of survey participant responses. The present study did not investigate why there was a disparity between the string professor interview subjects’ string methods courses and those reported by survey participants and the public school interview subjects.

It is important to some string professors that non-string students have an interest toward string methods class and understand that it is a valuable part of a comprehensive music education. While some non-string students may not already have this attitude entering the string methods class as is evidenced by public school teacher B, it is some string professors’ goal that both string and non-string students share the same interest level by the end of the class.

String professor A feels that non-string majors need to understand that some approaches to general musical concepts, such as rhythm, are different with string instruments as compared with wind or other instrument approaches. Her example of teaching 16th notes earlier to a young string student than to a young wind student is due to
the nature of a string instrument playing fast notes more easily than a wind instrument playing fast notes.

Both string professors teach how to repair and purchase instruments, choose appropriate literature, how to instruct large string ensembles, and advanced string techniques in their string methods class. However, according to the current study, many non-string participants report not learning how to instruct larger string groups as well as encountering great difficulty teaching advanced string techniques such as vibrato and shifting.

String professors expect that non-string music education majors possess string skills that would enable them to play well enough to get them through a typical first school year. Such skills include proper hand position, proper instrument and bow hold, characteristic tone, tuning a stringed instrument, the ability to adjust for intonation, and proper fingerings.

Finally, it appears that non-string teachers may become effective string teachers if they understand their responsibility to their students as well as their profession to develop any string skills in which they are lacking to become successful string teachers. As with any other skill, not everything necessary to the success of a music educator can be taught in a methods class. According to both string professor and public school teacher interview subjects, non-string teachers should further their string education through workshops and in-service clinics, communication with experienced string teachers, and private lessons. Post-baccalaureate programs in music education are also excellent ways to continue professional string development context and perspective.
In conclusion, despite their decline in recent years, there is still promise for a strong future for string programs in the United States. If string methods classes in music education programs are improved, non-string teachers have a better chance of becoming successful string educators. Data were gathered from teachers representing a wide cross section of the United States. The information gathered in this study suggests that if current practices are continued in most string methods classes across the country, under-educated non-string teachers may be contributing to the deterioration of string education. Therefore it is important that non-string teachers understand the responsibility they have, not only to themselves and their students, but to the future of string programs to develop any string skills in which they are lacking. As investigated in this study, most non-string teachers found their greatest string resource to be other experienced string teachers.

The researcher has provided information about the issues of non-string teachers teaching strings. Further comparison research is needed to examine how some string teacher training colleges and universities produce more successful non-string teachers than others. The current research found many discrepancies between the survey responses from non-string teachers who currently teach strings and the interview results from the string professors regarding the quality of their string education. Information gained in an investigation of discrepancies between string teachers currently teaching strings and string professors would serve as a template for the benefit of string teacher training programs across the country.

Additional studies regarding a more in-depth investigation of the effectiveness of string mentors on the success of non-string teachers in their first year could have a tremendous impact on the lack of current string teacher mentor programs. Finally, a more
comprehensive survey on how string methods courses could be improved by non-string teachers who have recently completed their first year teaching strings would yield valuable suggestions for the future of string teachers and string programs.
Dear fellow string teacher, 2 May 2008

As string teachers, you and I understand the value of keeping the string programs in our schools resilient and enduring. The attached survey questionnaire, concerning the issues of teachers with non-string backgrounds teaching strings, is part of an examination of the pedagogical experiences string teachers in Nevada secondary schools possess, and which skills they deem essential during their first years teaching strings.

I am particularly interested in your response because your experience, first as a music education student, then as a current string teacher, will significantly contribute toward addressing the problems new string teachers face during their first years in the rehearsal room.

This survey is being sent to secondary school string teachers across Nevada. In order for the survey results to be meaningful, it is vital that as many survey questionnaires as possible are filled out and returned! In order to assist in your response, a stamped, self-addressed envelope has been enclosed. I would very much appreciate it if your response was returned prior to May 12th.

As a teacher and researcher (I am a Music Education graduate student at the University of Las Vegas, Nevada), I understand your feeling that your responses should be held in strict confidence. I welcome any additional comments concerning any aspect of non-string teachers teaching strings and will keep all names and responses in complete anonymity.

I will be happy to send you a summary of the results of this survey if you desire. Thank you for your cooperation and support of this project.

Sincerely,

Melissa Newbrey
APPENDIX B

SURVEY
Please answer each question by circling the appropriate information:

I. Background

1. Do you currently hold a Music Education degree?
   Yes  No

2. At which college/ university did you complete your undergraduate music studies?

3. How many years have you taught strings?
   ____ 1-3  ____ 4-6  ____ 7-10  ____ 10+

II. Under-Graduate String Methods Class (For the purpose of this research, 'string methods class' is defined as a course in which undergraduate students learn the fundamentals of playing, and sometimes teaching the various string instruments.)

1. Were you required to take a string methods class in your undergraduate music education curriculum?
   Yes  No

2. Did you learn techniques on all string orchestra instruments?
   Yes  No
   - If No, which instruments were omitted?

3. How many weeks/ months/ semesters were spent learning:
   Violin _____ Viola _____ Cello _____ Bass _____

4. In your opinion, do you feel the time you spent learning these instruments was
   Too Long  Too Short  Just Right

5. Did you participate in “peer” teaching during the course of the class?
   Yes  No
6. Who taught your string methods class?
   String Professor  Graduate String Student
   Other: __________________________________________

7. What type of student text did your string methods class utilize?
   Strictly Strings  Essential Elements
   Muller-Rusch supplementary material
   Other: __________________________________________

8. Which string pedagogy text did your string methods class require?
   Strategies for Teaching Strings  Teaching Strings
   None
   Other: __________________________________________

9. Did you find the skills learned in your string methods class applicable to your first year of teaching strings?
   - If Yes, how? ______________________________________
   - If No, why not? __________________________________

10. Please list any improvements you would suggest to your undergraduate string methods class:
    __________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________
    __________________________________________________

**If you are a string player teaching strings, please return the survey at this time. Thank you for your participation!**

*** If you are a non-string player teaching strings, please continue to the next section (over).
III. Teaching Strings

Please use the following scale to rate how the level of difficulty of each issue by checking the appropriate box:
1= not at all, 2= a little, 3= somewhat, 4= quite a bit, 5= very much,
NA= not applicable

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IV. First Year String Teaching Assistance

1. During your first year of teaching strings, were you assigned a music mentor?  Yes  No
   - If Yes, was the mentor a string player?  Yes  No
   - How often did you communicate with your music mentor:
     Daily  Weekly  Monthly

2. Did you ever seek assistance from other string teachers in your district during your first year of string teaching?  Yes  No

3. During your first year of teaching strings, did you participate in string workshops or in-service clinics?  Yes  No

Please use the following scale to rate how helpful each subject listed below was in supporting your first year of string teaching by checking the appropriate box:
1= not at all, 2=a little, 3=somewhat, 4=quite a bit, 5=very much, NA=not applicable

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Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey!

Would you like to know the results? If so, please list an email or other address where results may be sent (all results will be completely confidential):

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________
Dear fellow string teacher,

You should have by now received a survey questionnaire asking for your feedback on string teacher training and the issues of teachers with non-string backgrounds teaching strings. I am sure you will agree with me that in order for our string programs to become stronger and endure, it is important that we have opportunities like these to let our voices be heard.

If you have already filled out and mailed the copy of this survey questionnaire which I sent to you earlier, thank you!; please disregard this one. However, if you have not yet responded, I would greatly appreciate it if you would do so now. I am enclosing another survey as well as a new stamped and self-addressed envelope.

As a teacher and researcher (I am a Music Education graduate student at the University of Las Vegas, Nevada), I understand your feeling that your responses should be held in strict confidence. I welcome any additional comments concerning any aspect of non-string teachers teaching strings and will keep all names and responses in complete anonymity. I will be happy to send you a summary of the results of this survey if you desire.

Your prompt response is certainly appreciated.

Thank you for your support of this project,

Sincerely,

Melissa Newbrey
PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER A INTERVIEW

Q. When you graduated, were you looking for a band-director position?
A. I already knew I wanted to do strings at that time. So I started really messing around with the strings and stuff and trying to teach myself, or I had some string friends show me some things. I thought I made a poor assumption with the trombone because they’re so much to it with the embouchure and the breathing and all that I was like, strings, man all they have to do is move their fingers and I was just like holy crap! It’s all around! But it’s difficult and I like the challenge

Q. What made you get into strings?
A. You know, it was actually one of those kind of moments that seems fake, but it really happened. My junior year, no it might have been my senior year (I went to _______ High School and _______ was the band director) and we went to the NY philharmonic and they played a whole bunch of pieces including at that time my favorite symphony which was the 5th symphony which was kind of the only one I was exposed to as a young kid, so I was already a fan and I heard that and just a whole bunch of other things, you know.... A Barber piece, and I loved it! I was like, WOW, you know, the sounds. So I started playing with the orchestra at _______ high school they did a couple of symphonic pieces and I was like, wow! You know the sounds that they’re capable of making, the textures and everything the overall effect it’s so different. So I knew I wanted to do strings. I actually wanted to teach symphonic strings get the winds in there as well. I hadn’t really had an opportunity to do that. Yeah, we kind of did that at my first school, but, you know the inner-city schools... it was a little difficult but we got it going. It was alright. It was rewarding.

Q. What is your actual job description?
A. I teach 2 courses of orchestra there. And I teach 4 courses of music technology.

Q. How many years have you been teaching strings?
A. 3 years

Q. What was your rating at the last district festival with your top orchestra?
A. Superior.

Q. Has it been consistent?
A. Yeah. I’ve gotten all superiors with my groups.
Q. So your actual degree is in music ed.?
A. Yes. It’s a Bachelor in music Ed. BM.

Q. Where did you student teach? What age group?
A. I student taught at _______ Middle school with __________ [orchestra]

Q. When you were going to __________, were you required to take a string methods course?
A. Mmmhmm, yes

Q. Going along with that, then, when did you take it in your course schedule?
A. My sophomore year, or maybe my junior year.

Q. So kind of in the middle of the year?
A. Yeah, the middle

Q. How long did it take you to get through?
A. I took 4 1/2 years. I took a semester off getting a minor in ________.

Q. Who was your string methods teacher?
A. __________

Q. And his position is...?
A. He’s the cello teacher, but I don’t know...

Q. But he taught all the string methods?
A. There was just one string methods course with all the instruments.

Q. So, you just learned, from one teacher, all the instruments?
A. Yes

Q. How much time was spent on each instrument?
A. You know, it was only one semester, so it was 16 weeks. Maybe a couple weeks on each one. But we kind of did them together. We did focus down on the bass, and then we’d focus on the viola and the cello, and such. But we did a little bit of ensemble stuff and played as an ensemble a couple of times and used the method book.

Q. Which method book did you use?
A. I don’t remember, most of the materials that were used were hand-outs. Hand out materials that __________ had.

Q. That he created himself?
A. That he created, or just from other sources. Collegiate sources. They were good. The standard stuff. The parts of the instrument, some of the history and stuff, like the viola.
Q. Did you peer teach?
A. Yeah, we did

Q. To what extent?
A. It wasn’t too much. I don’t remember, you know, doing it that much. Maybe one class would get together and do it for 10 minutes or so. I can’t really give you any objective honest information because I don’t remember

Q. But there was some?
A. There was some.

Q. Ok. Were you in band in college?
A. Mmhmm.

Q. Did you take the string methods class seriously?
A. Yeah. I did. In fact, oh, this will be arrogant, but it’s truthful and that’s what you need. Yeah. Really, really seriously. But you know the other band guys were sitting in there, and you know how band guys are, it’s all the same way, you know. I was a low brass player and we like to have fun, we like to have a good time and we mess around a lot. And they did. Especially the drummers. There were 2 guys in particular who were always messing around and stuff. But it kept it fun, but I took it seriously because I was like, I need to focus here, I don’t know string instruments and I want to teach orchestra, so this is the class.

Q. They just took it because they had to, right? They knew they were going to teach band?
A. Yeah. Right. And they are teaching band. These guys would never take an orchestra gig. They’d rather just go work at a 7-11 or something. I’m kidding.

Q. What was the most helpful thing you learned in string methods course that you can remember?
A. Maybe the patience that you need to learn the string instruments. Like I said, I approached it thinking that it would be more simple than wind instruments and you know, they both have their difficulties in learning the instruments. I went in there thinking, ‘You know I’m learning this as a beginner with some music background, so imagine a 6th grader with no music background trying to learn this’. Or with very little background in strings. You know they’ll have some music knowledge. Or you know some kids will come in where they don’t know what a quarter note is and you have to start from the VERY beginning.

Q. You graduated and went right into teaching strings?
A. Per my request. A lot of the band guys that have gone into the string positions have come right out they couldn’t get a band job so they feel like they got stuck in strings, but now they’re back in band
Q. So, how much information do you think you retained from your string methods course? Do you think you could have taught orchestra based solely on what you learned in string methods?

A. No, no. Of course not. And nothing against _______. I like him, I thought he handled the course pretty well, but how much can you teach really in 15 weeks really because you’ve got finals week. There’s so much to learn on the instruments, and that program was already pretty strenuous. In fact, the former pres said it was the second most strenuous major there on campus after engineering. So yeah, it much more than business, or whatever.

Q. As far as workload?

A. Yeah, the workload. Yeah, we spend a ton of time, you know, practicing. I petitioned for an overload most of the semesters there. Do you know what I mean?

Q. No

A. You can’t take more than 15 credits. 12 is full-time, 15 is overload. And then, like 18 I think they’ll let you take sophomore year. Or something like that. But one semester I took 21 credits, one semester I took 22 credits. You know, I was just there all day because I wanted to finish this degree and it still took me 4 1/2 years doing that. It takes a lot of people 5 years, 5 1/2 years. So anyway, my point is there is already so much content in there, of course more time should be spent in the methods course, but you know it would be a 6-year bachelor’s with all those added things. I think that’s just how it is. It’s so limited because there’s so much curriculum and so little time. So, I didn’t really feel prepared from the methods course at all. It gave me the tools that I need and I had somewhat of a paradigm shift which is very important, that’s really more of what a university should teach. Not just skills, but conceptual understanding as well.

Q. Meaning what, specifically?

A. Well, ok. So the paradigm shift within me: I saw the strings in a certain way. I had my conceptions about them – misconceptions, I guess I should say. I had all these different assumptions and they all changed. I took my current knowledge, um, previous knowledge, my prior knowledge and I acquired this new knowledge to assimilate new ‘knowledges’, as Piaget would say. So I took everything that I knew and applied all this new information and it really changed, you know, it was a huge change in my mind about what strings is all about. There’s a lot more than I thought to it as far as assumptions, so that what I developed in that methods course which I thought was important. The skills thing, you know, was important. We learned the bow hold, and we spent some time on the bow hold which was important, and how to hold your instrument, and what kind of health issues might arise, and of course limiting yourself for a performance, so there were some important skill things as well that we learned.

Q. So you learned that all within your string methods course, before you even started teaching?

A. Yeah. It’s like the Cliff Notes on string pedagogy. You can’t get really deep, obviously, it’s like an introduction to each variable or point of orchestra
Q. Moving on to your first year teaching strings... I’m going to ask you about a few things and how you approached them. You can tell me if you, for example, used a conventional method book technique, or knowledge you learned in string methods class? First of all, how did you approach bowing?
A. My greatest resource was actually talking to string teachers. I really talked to my master teacher (from student teaching) a lot and we actually became good friends. We still talk now and hang out every once in a while. But yeah, I called her a lot and what she showed me in my student teaching was very valuable. And then I also had visits from the string project facilitator so that was helpful as well, but yeah, my colleagues would have been my greatest resource there. You know, method books are good and everything, but there’s only so much you can get from pen and paper. Music is so tactile and physical, you need to see it, you need to feel it, so that’s how I learned about bowing.

Q. So would you say the same for articulation?
A. Yeah, for pretty much all those, except for balance and blend. I definitely got that in my undergrad experience. Playing in the orchestra, we had some good teachers there, some good conductors, and we had some absolutely stellar guest conductors and they each had their own take and everything and the way they described it, you know, really helped me out. So I took that into there. And all of those things. I guess the universal music types of things, like articulation, intonation, dynamics, all of that was more in undergrad. And specific bowing and tuning, specific orchestra things I would have gotten more from my colleagues. I didn’t ever hear anyone talk about bowings and stuff like that in symphony rehearsal. The more orchestra-specific things I learned from my colleagues and with a little bit of knowledge from being in orchestra in college. And then the general music things like intonation, articulation, dynamics, came from my undergrad.

Q. What about instrument repair?
A. Instrument repair? Never been addressed. Didn’t talk about it in undergrad, not too much. Colleagues don’t really know... Best resource for instrument repair would probably be interact [email]. Yeah, I think that’s not really talked about. Not that new teachers have enough time to repair their instruments as well.

Q. In general, what was the hardest thing you encountered in teaching strings?
A. Intonation. I was a button-pusher. I pushed a valve and a note came out. You know, if I’ve got my tuning slide and my embouchure, and using good air, I’ll be in tune. All the buttons I push will be in tune. You know, generally in tune. It’s not like that at all on string instruments. So that was difficult for me because I could hear it so well. I’m like, ‘Can’t you hear it? Can’t you hear the third? You can’t tune that?’ It felt so obvious to me. I had to remember well yeah, when I was a middle school, high school kid, I didn’t have such a good grip on tuning, if any at all! So that was pretty difficult for me. I remember being at a Dean Angeles thing and they were talking about how in middle school it’s the left hand and in high school you talk more about the right hand and I’m like, ‘I’m sorry. I’m still focusing on the left hand. My kids just can’t play in tune. They know the D-scale, one octave. You know, we’re still on the left hand.’ So, intonation is very important.
Q. What would be the easiest thing you to teach?
A. The easiest thing? The general music principles. Dynamics and stuff like that because that’s a direct transfer. It was kind of difficult in some aspects because of the range of the string instrument. You can only play so loud. On a trombone you can go from a whisper to deafening roar. You can’t get that much pull out of strings because you need at least a minimum to maintain a good tone. But yeah, I’d say the general music principles: dynamics, blend, those kind of things transfer pretty easily. And I think that’s one of the things that have contributed to my success. I was exposed to them in my undergrad, I had a pretty good conceptual knowledge of what I wanted to do with those things and my interpretation. All those thing kind of went in and were all ingredients to help me with my success. I knew, ok, well, you need this crescendo. To do this, this diminuendo to do this, these accents should be like this, or what they’re trying to do on beats 2 and 4 here or whatever those general things are.

Q. So actually applying things to the instrument is all stuff you learned in undergrad?
A. So, no. So, you’re right. My first year I didn’t use too many orchestra terms at all, string instrument terms. I would keep it general. And I found actually that the kids would respond pretty well. I would be like, ‘This needs more emphasis’ and I’d use a lot of humor. You know, I would say stuff like, ‘Put some stank on it’ and the inner-city kids would be like, ‘Ahhh’ and they would transfer it right away and they would use more bow speed and more pressure and they’re more into it. It’s kind of natural.

Q. So you weren’t over-analyzing every technique?
A. My first year, definitely not. My second year a little bit, then last year starting to get there, and next year I’ll start hitting it more heavily. But I still want to keep those general principles. Because the kids, they visualize it and they do respond to it, they respond to it well, and that might be wrong. That might be poor pedagogy but it’s been successful for me.

Q. Did you incorporate any band techniques into your string teaching?
A. A lot of my kids have never heard of subdivision. In fact, last year I finally had a kid who had done some subdivision techniques and exercises, and some of my kids came from good middle schools, not that good teachers necessarily use subdivision, but that was one of the major things.

Q. How exactly would you use it?
A. We’d do clapping, we’d break down each beat and find out like how many eight notes, like find the smallest note that was in there, the subdivision. Sometimes.... have you ever heard of BRIM? Breath Impulse Method?

Q. No.
A. You impulse a breath on the subdivisions. So you’d go ‘ha-ha-ha-ha’ like for a half note because there are 4 8th notes in it. I kind of tried to do that but that was pretty unsuccessful. Yeah, it didn’t really work out too well. And I tried to think of different ways. Maybe in the future if I had more experience and expertise maybe I think I might
be able to incorporate it somehow but that was huge when I did it in band. It just gave me such a good understanding of the pulse and counting a lot better. It was different things like that. So, I tried that, and that failed. Subdivision has been pretty good. Like I said, we’ll break it down sometimes with the claps and that kind of thing, and we do rhythmic exercises too. I know there are teachers around town that do it, but I haven’t seen it too much.

Q. So you think it’s more of a band thing? To do the subdivision?
A. I don’t know. All I’ve been exposed to is band teachers. But from what I understand and from talking to people, I think that rhythm in general is more evident in band.

Q. Do you have an idea why that is?
A. Uh… I don’t know. In orchestra, it’s very natural, the 8th notes. Because it’s a down-bow, then an up-bow. So it’s really natural. Maybe a lot of it comes really naturally so they don’t have to think about it, whereas band you have to think about it a little bit more. String music in general… this may be wildly incorrect, but I think is more flowing whereas there’s more rhythmic emphasis in band. There’s the strong percussion in the background, you know the snare and the bass drum, and that gives you the internal pulse and a steady beat. So I think all of those things combined. But… I don’t have any objective research that would be able to back that up. It would just be qualitative data.

Q. What method book did you use your first year teaching strings?
A. Well, I used Essential Elements for Strings 2000. I used that for a little bit, but I taught at 2 high schools and the previous year one of the schools had gotten a 3 minus, and the other school had gotten a 4 and the students were all over the place as far as knowledge. There’s one class at _______ high school, one orchestra and all the kids are thrown in there, so you have all the different levels and all the different levels of expertise and that was hard to deal with. So when you use a string method book and you’re on, say # 89, some students are bored out of their minds, and some students can’t even do it yet. So it doesn’t really allow for differentiated instruction. It kind of limits you. So I started using Finale heavily and I would create my own exercises, and I started, once again, to use my colleagues. _______ at _______ high school has been really helpful. Our communication was heavy. We’d speak 2 times a week, 3 times a week for quite a while each time. And I kept going to my master teacher, and other good teachers that others said were good teachers to help me out. They gave me ideas for what I could do for my exercises. Or to even tell me resources. They’d say, ‘Oh check out this piece’. The ‘Teaching Orchestra through Performance’ book was good as well. It gives you a lot of examples.

Q. How did you learn to choose literature?
A. I used colleagues. _______ high school had one filing cabinet for music. It was a disaster. And a lot of them were like 4s and 5s. We played, I think we were SO 3, or maybe we played two 3s and one 4 at festival and that was really difficult, and you know, a lot of middle schools are playing that. So anyway, I had to find some ones and I’d call _______ or I’d call___________ and I’d say, ‘So, I don’t have any violas and I’ve got one bass player’ or something like that ‘but I’ve got a couple of strong violins’
so they would know, they were like, 'Ok. This piece is great. It teaches dotter-quarter, it teaches dotted-quarter 8th rhythms' and you know, whatever it might have. So yeah, I used my colleagues heavily for that. Almost entirely. I'd call them and they're like, 'Ok. Yeah. Do this piece and this piece.' And they would have some piece that are difficult, but allow for concept implementation. You know, they're approachable for the students. So that was the first couple of years. And now I go to festivals, I listen online, I listen to those CDs that they send out, I'm always listening for literature. So now I kind of know what I like but I'll still call them and say, 'Well OK, for festival I definitely picked this piece and this piece... I like these two pieces... what would be another grade 4 or 5 that we could do that would compliment these but not be way too difficult as well.'

Q. Did you ever teach a band?
A. Yeah, I taught last year. I taught a band at _____ high school. Just one band class.

Q. Was that the first time you'd ever taught band?
A. Yes.

Q. Are you going to continue teaching band?
A. No, the band program was hugely unsuccessful. We had some good students. There are two good middle schools that fed some pretty good students... there were some kids that really knew their scales, then there were a lot of poor kids, or, you know, poor players as well, as any situation or most situations, but we didn’t have a room. They kept moving use. We didn’t have any music stands. I was trying to get them everywhere, I borrowed some, but it wasn’t enough, we had wire stands... there was no place to put our instruments, so we were carrying around a tuba, putting it in a classroom in a corner. Horrible. Those kids were so mistreated. We didn’t have any money. They didn’t give us any budget, so we were just borrowing everything. We didn’t get percussion equipment until December and we borrowed some used marching equipment. So we had a marching bass drum and snare drum, we didn’t have cymbals or anything. We didn’t have any of the ‘toys’, that’s what the percussionists call them. It was just so frustrating. So I just focused on the basics with those kids. We borrowed some music, we played that. But yeah, we just worked on basics. A lot of those kids didn’t know how to hold their instrument or breathe, so we worked on that. We actually finally, around January, we actually started getting pretty decent. Our last concert, for what we had, playing on the marching equipment and all the borrowed old broken instruments from, like, these middle schools, the first middle schools that were around, it wasn’t bad and next year it probably could have gone on but the school was like, ‘We have no place to put you and we have no money to buy you new instruments’. That was the unsuccessful, so yeah. I had so many parents calling me, griping and stuff and I was like, ‘Are you kidding me?’ I spent over 200 hours last summer alone looking for grants and calling people and trying to borrow stuff and fix instruments so we’d have something to play. Yeah, that was a horrible experience. I almost quit the district.

Q. What kind of in-service and workshops did you attend during your first year?
A. All of them. Every one that came up. I did the leadership course with Dr. Tim. That was pretty good. It was kind of happy-feely and I was sardonic, I guess, in nature
teaching in the inner cities. I was like, ‘Yeah, right.’ Because sarcasm – my kids react well to sarcasm. It was a lot different and that happy-touchy-feely thing, you go in there and they’re like ‘Get real, mister.’ Haha. But it was still good and I was charged after that. The Dean Angeles thing was good the first year I did that. And that was good. He focuses on middle school I think, in that session. That was exactly what I needed. I would recommend that to a lot of people.

Q. Were these district-mandated, or optional?
A. They’re all optional. The district actually can’t mandate those. You’re contract. They’re outside of the contract. I did do the first-year bump, by going to new-teacher modules. And those were really more general education stuff. But some of it helped me with classroom management or things like that. And I don’t know if that’s in your interview, but I think that’s what helped me with my successes; general teaching concepts, general pedagogy kind of stuff. Your kids need to be on task, they need to know what’s expected, they need to be responsible, you need to be responsible, they need feedback, you know, all the different things, summative assessment, on-going assessment... yeah, all those things are important. And that theory. I love theory: Piaget, Erickson...

Q. Do you have any suggestions for future teacher in-services that would have helped you in your first year?
A. Yeah, I think we need more in-services. I’m trying to develop them on the technology side. Like, we have an expo. that’s coming up that I’m doing an in-service, and it’s just showing tools that make your life easier, there are so many different things that we need to do right before or even during rehearsal and just how technology can ease that, and how to use it differently as well. It kind of sucks at the beginning but once you set everything up, and like, Finale, you can use that every year, or Smart Music, or just things like that. So I think there are some in-services and the problem with professional development is that it’s fragmented and it causes overload on the teacher. There’s so much to deal with the first year and having all these different things, trying to remember all these things that teachers just get overwhelmed and overloaded. But I still think, even with that in mind, I still think there’s room for more in-services, if we can manage them. We can’t get the district-mandated ones, obviously, if the budget cuts aren’t going to help either, they’re not going to pay for extra days for teachers or anything like that, but if we can get more guest-type of things, after-school and weekend kind of things.... Unfortunately, I’ve gone to a lot of those and the turn-outs have been pretty low. Sometimes we go to these that have pretty big artists or pedagogue, and there will be like 6 or 7 people there, and it’s like, ‘Oh, well.’ But that’s neither here nor there. But yeah, I think there’s room. I think we can get more specialists, I think that even the people that we have in town we could use a little more, if they’d be willing. Just set up different workshops. Workshops are where it’s at. PDE credits, grad courses if the grad courses are cheap. They have a high turn-out rate. So I think things like that, the grad courses, the PDE courses, I definitely think we could use more things like that. Any help that I could have gotten I would have taken.
Q. As a non-string teacher teaching strings, is there anything you would have liked to have received during your first year that you did not receive?
A. If we could have had some of the veteran string teacher come in and work with me, or pay for days or do trade-outs or do something to watch me, watch them... because you learn a lot.... the culminating experiences and stuff in student teaching at the end are pretty good, you kind of wrap up everything, but after you actually teach, so much changes. You know what I mean? Once you actually get in the classroom, you’re like, ‘Oh, ok.’ There’s so much you learn and if I were just to re-approach or just observe these things again, I’d pull a lot more from it. So, those kind of opportunities would be great. To see some of the veteran teachers, or have some of them in classroom a little more often. More reflection after the festivals, you know, and that kind of thing would be good. I think a lot of it was by someone. I know you said, ‘receive’, and I think there’s a lot I could have done as well... I don’t know if that’s your question.

Q. That’s actually my next question. What could you have done as a new teacher for yourself?
A. Ok. I think what’s really important that I missed out on that I should have done: take private lessons. Go and learn a string instrument. I didn’t do that and I think that would have been hugely beneficial. At that time I started my masters, I was in the army, and I was just trying to keep my head above water with my current teaching and all that and I was like, ‘yeah, I don’t have time for that’ but yeah, I should have made time. No excuses. I should have done it and I think that would have really helped me.

Q. Were you assigned a string mentor your first year teaching strings?
A. No. But it didn’t matter because I had mentors. I established friendships with ____, just talked with good teachers, and you know, go to all-state and ask a ton of questions. I’m a really out-going person. I’ll just go straight up to someone and say, ‘Hey, what do you think of this, what do you think of that?’ I’m not shy at all. I’ll go and get as much as I can. Teachers are helpful that way. I’ve never been turned away, or refused or run into anyone with a bad attitude. They exist, but I think I know who they are so I think I know who to go to.

Q. Do you have any suggestions for first-year non-string teachers teaching strings?
A. Ask questions and get to know the veteran teachers. Look at last year’s scores to see who played pretty good pieces of literature, because it’s one thing to play low-grade music, but see who did well and who’s playing good music. Seek them out. Talk to teachers who... most likely these new teachers go to inner city, they go into the gigs that no one wants, then transfer out... So talk to successful teachers in those areas. That’s one thing that I could have done more. Most of the people I talked to had brand-new schools on the outside of town and the upper-socio-economic levels. Talk to people that are successful, find out what they did.

Q. Anything else?
A. Seek out the resources, talk to the people. It really starts with the people. Because if you have no idea where to get started, if you have no idea what good method books are out there... ________ has 4 amazing books out there that he recommends and they’re
great. It's talking to the people and they'll give you the resources. If you don't know where to start, just get started with them. They'll point you in the right direction. Obviously I'm a big technology advocate so I would recommend that new teachers, if they can, try to use the technology to help manage. We could share materials with technology. There are so many thing we could be doing that we're not. If we could share PDF's of training materials, or midi files, or whatever.
Q. What's your current title?
A. I'm full time orchestra, but they have me teaching guitar and jazz band.

Q. How many years have you been teaching total?
A. I just finished up my second year.

Q. And you've been teaching strings both years?
A. Yes

Q. What degree do you hold?
A. Bachelor's Degree in Music Education with a minor in Jazz Studies

Q. What's your primary instrument?
A. Alto Saxophone

Q. Where did you complete your student teaching?
A. At _________ High school. It included band as well as strings. That's really where I got my first string experience.

Q. Was that a requirement for all student teachers?
A. Nope. That's kind of how it turned out. Three band classes and two string classes.

Q. When you were in your undergrad, were you required to take a string methods course?
A. One semester of methods. It only covered violin, viola, cello. We only had a one-class lecture on the bass where someone brought the bass in, so no one even got to play the bass.

Q. How was the class set up?
A. It was broken up within the semester into a couple week-segments where the first couple of weeks you were on one instrument, and the next few weeks you moved to another... so you'd do all 3 instruments broken within the semester

Q. How many students were in the class?
A. I'd say 17 or 18
Q. Did you all learn the same instruments at the same time, or was it a mixed ensemble?
A. It was like an ensemble.

Q. Did you have a chance to experience teaching each other the instrument?
A. No

Q. What literature did you use?
A. We used the Strictly Strings. Is that the Yamaha? I know we used Strictly Strings and I’m pretty sure we touched on the Yamaha. I think it was more like a comparison... trying to compare the books.

Q. Did you get any supplementary material?
A. Handouts. Teacher handouts.

Q. Who taught your string methods course?
A. I don’t remember, and she was really bad, so she got let go. She was an older lady, she was only there for one semester. I don’t think she was a professor... she may have had her master’s, I’m not sure... but I think it was kind of like they didn’t have anyone to teach us and they kind of just found whoever they could for the semester.

Q. Did she just play the violin?
A. She was a string teacher. It changed after that lady got canned because they actually brought on another professor who was the coordinator for the string education program. So she started teaching after that. It’s kind of changed around now, but I kind of got the short end of the stick on that.

Q. As a band musician, were you in any orchestras at all?
A. No. Never been in orchestra.

Q. How seriously did you take this string methods course?
A. Not at all! I had no interest in teaching strings. I had no desire to teach strings. It was just to get through the requirement. It wasn’t until, actually, student teaching that I thought I could... because I applied for a string position out here as well as band... whatever I could get I would take, because I actually enjoyed teaching strings.

Q. Was everyone in your string methods class from a band background?
A. There were some strings in there. They were required to take string methods. But the majority of people in there were kind of like, it was just a credit. Even the string players. That’s kind of how the class was treated at first. The teacher was horrible.

Q. Did the string students help you at all?
A. Yeah. There was a lot of help on the side, not actually instruction. Little hints. There was a lot of that going on with the string players because the teacher was so bad.
Q. What was the most helpful thing you learned in string methods class?
A. Probably how to tune the instruments.

Q. When you graduated college, did you go directly into teaching strings?
A. Yes

Q. Do you feel you could have been successful during your first year teaching string based solely on what you learned in your string methods course?
A. In the string methods course? Probably not.

Q. Why did you decide to take a string job instead of band?
A. Because I wanted to be teaching my first year. That was the sole reason. I wanted an experience, regardless of where it was. I didn’t want to not use my degree. The market in ________ was really bad. That’s why I joined out here. I took the first thing that was offered to me.

Q. Did you use any method books when you started teaching strings?
A. I really haven’t used any method books in high school. I want to, it’s just a bit overwhelming. We have the Essential Techniques, Book 3, the green one. I know there’s a lot of good stuff in there but I have yet to really implement them in my class. Mainly because I’m not really familiar with them. I just need to go through them more, I guess.

Q. When you were teaching in your first year, how did you approach bowing?
A. Bowing was really difficult at first because there was so much my first year to grasp, and learn. So I really didn’t touch bowing much until more toward the end of the year at the second semester. And it was more exercises, picking out excerpts from the piece and just doing that. Basically just making exercises out of that, out of stuff we were working on. Maybe do the scales on that rhythm. Even break it down to just open strings.

Q. What about things like articulation?
A. It was hard. I tried to get them to sing the articulations, really over-exaggerating as they sang it as far as the articulation, whether it was short… that way they would really understand what it should sound like when they bowed.

Q. Do you feel like that was successful?
A. No. Because being the first year, trying to change so much stuff from the previous teacher, it was like, “Oh why do I have to sing, I’ve never had to sing before.” It almost seemed like I spent a lot of time fighting with them, getting them to sing. But I think in the long run, now that they’re more used to that, I think it’s helping.

Q. So you still do it?
A. I still do it. And then even articulation exercises… going back to the whole bowing thing, taking an excerpt of a piece and making scale exercises out of it.
Q. What about dynamics or intonation?
A. Intonation is hard. Dynamics. That’s one thing that I really, really try to get them to do. I can’t stand more than anything listening to a monotone group. I just relate it to really, really over-exaggerate it to the point that it’s almost over-playing the instrument for the fortes, then back it down to the pianos — hardly play anything. They never perform that way because they revert back to where they’re comfortable with when they’re in a performance situation, but at least if it’s over-exaggerated it I still feel like they get something out of it, they just don’t do it as much.

Q. How did you deal with intonation in your first year of teaching? Did you deal with it or ignore it?
A. A little of both. For me, I had a hard time hearing it. I can hear when two right next to each other are playing out of tune, but when I have a whole group playing... not really used to having a large group in front of me. It was the string sound; my ear’s not trained for that. And even the large group, I had a hard time hearing the overall intonation up close, but then I could step back and really hear it. I think it was just learning to hear right in front of the group. That’s something I really struggled with. Last year I started doing a lot of the drone, playing with the tonic. I think that definitely helps, but that’s an ongoing battle. Especially in the 9th grade, with the freshmen. Because they’re coming from different schools and different expectations.

Q. How about the balance?
A. Balance is probably a little bit easier to adjust as a whole, but then again I had trouble this past year with my advanced group with the actual size of the sections. Balance was really tough. I had two cellos - at some point I only had one cello - and one bass competing with all of the fiddles. Festival was rough – out of three of my basses, two of them didn’t show up and out of my two cellos, I told the one girl she couldn’t come. Because she had just missed so much, she had missed a concert because of work, so I just didn’t let her play. But it was tough. The balance was way off. But I think overall it’s easier to adjust because you’re just dealing with the five sections, between the 1st and 2nd violins.

Q. You said you learned tuning in undergrad? How is that going?
A. My advanced group, the kids tune. First year and last year I let the kids tune. I was only tuning them to an ‘A’, and they were doing everything else. Which I’m going to change next year because some of them can do it but a majority of them can’t hit it spot-on.... They’re always off.

Q. What about instrument repair your first year?
A. Instrument repair for a string instrument is pretty basic. There’s really not much you can do for major stuff. Putting a bridge on – if it’s fit for an instrument, I can do that, but as far as shaving it down, I can’t do that. Resetting the sound post – if I had the tools, I could probably figure it out, but I just don’t have the tools. Bass repair, like restringing the instrument, all that other stuff, is really all you CAN do, with a string instrument. I haven’t really run into many things I couldn’t fix, whether it was like a rattling fine-tuner. I mean, basically, that’s all there is. It’s not like a saxophone where the key’s not closing
all the way, or a trumpet where the valves are stuck, or a slide’s stuck. This year I finally got peg glue. I got the liquid stuff, and the chalk to make the pegs start to work better.

Q. So do you utilize the repair shop?
A. I don’t think I really had to take anything there. I think my bass sound post fell off once. When the endpins fall in, I can get them out. I’ve gotten many endpins out of the cello before. I know a lot of people would send it to instrument repair for that, but just play around with it long enough, you can get it out.

Q. Which concepts did you find the hardest to teach your first year?
A. The hardest, I think, is intonation, down to the bow hold.

Q. The bow hold was the easiest, or that was the hardest?
A. That is still a tough thing to do. Just the bow hold. My first year there were just so many things I was having trouble with. __________ [mentor] helped me out a lot. The easiest thing? That’s tough. There really wasn’t an easy thing to teach my first year. Even last year, I don’t find any of it really easy to teach.

Q. Do you incorporate any band techniques into your teaching?
A. Lots of counting and singing, which I know is huge in band. I know a lot of strings, they don’t do that. I guess that is something that is in string techniques, but...

Q. Do you feel like you focus on a lot of rhythmic stuff?
A. A lot of rhythm stuff, yeah. I’m really particular on not moving on unless the rhythm is perfect. I can deal with missed notes – that will get better eventually, but if they don’t know the rhythm, they’re not going to know the music.

Q. You said you don’t use method books. Is it mostly because you’re not familiar with them?
A. I’m not familiar with them and what I should be using out of them. I guess that’s something that’s slacking on my part, but a lot of high schools don’t really use methods, seems like.

Q. How did you get familiar with string literature?
A. Basically that first year, I really over-programmed my first year with all my groups. I really didn’t know any string literature. My first string experience was student teaching. It was a lot of talking with my advisor, my mentor teacher [master teacher] he had a really good string program. So taking stuff that he did my first year was probably a little too much for my groups. It was a lot of talking. I talked to __________ and __________, I borrowed a lot of stuff from ________ my first year. I went out there and got a lot of tips from those guys, just to see what they were doing.

Q. What do you think would be different between choosing music for band versus for orchestra?
A. Honestly, that’s tough because I’ve never really had to choose for band. Basically, the way I’ve been choosing music... well, last year I was over-programming, just
grabbing big names that people had done before that maybe my group could handle, like ‘Maybe, I don’t know, we’ll find out, see if they can get it there for festival’. This year I pre-planned, I looked over the music as far as position they would be in, keys, bowings, seeing if it was stuff they could handle.

Q. What kind of teacher in-services/workshops did you attend your first year?
A. My first year I did a lot. I did the Dean Angeles, the in-services. I did a lot of out-sourcing of my own, talking to teachers whenever I saw them, a lot with the veteran teachers. __________ [mentor teacher] would have people over to her house and she would do, like for new teachers, how to handle all the paperwork stuff, like festival. I think... I know she did a bass workshop because they didn’t hold a bass workshop my first year, and it was just a lot of stuff that I didn’t know, because like I said, I didn’t have bass methods and I was completely clueless.

Q. What was __________’s exact position title?
A. I don’t know what her title was my first year. She was the first person I would ask basically just ‘cause I knew her more than I knew the other teachers. It wasn’t until more towards the second semester that I actually talked to __________ or __________.

Q. How did you contact her? Did you call her? Email her?
A. Both. And she was also at my feeder school. I would go down there occasionally, too, and I got a lot from just watching her teach, which helped. But watching middle school as compared with high school is completely different.

Q. Which in-service/ workshop did you find most helpful?
A. Probably the Dean Angeles one. I learned more in those 2 classes than I did in methods class, and I got a lot more out of it than I did my methods class. I really enjoyed it. And I went to last year’s as well. But his workshops were geared more toward beginning strings, so trying to take that and use that in high school was tough. But I did try to pull some stuff, but being that it was all beginning strings, there was no way I could get my kids to sit there and pluck open strings like we did in that workshop. I do have them do that for the tonic, but...

Q. How often did you communicate with your mentor?
A. Probably a couple times a week. Whenever I had something that I needed help with or I had questions about.

Q. What kind of questions would you ask your mentor?
A. Whether it be about literature or even fingerings, how she’d play this, what position should they be in here, to what kind of bow should they use, or what part of the bow... You know, when I was first learning, I learned spicatto in my student teaching and didn’t realize until this recent in-service that there were several types of spicatto.

Q. Have you ever taken lessons on string instruments?
A. No. I mean, I’ve gotten pointers on instruments, but never actually like, taken lessons on the cello, or practiced the cello like I should.
Q. As a non-string teacher, what advice would you give to other non-string teachers?
A. Are we talking after graduation?

Q. Yes, starting their first year of teaching.
A. Don’t be afraid of it because I enjoy it. I don’t think I’d want to do a high school band job because of the marching band thing. But I find the literature a lot better, more good literature to choose from. You have 4 instruments, as opposed to a bunch of instruments, and it’s all on concert key. I really enjoy strings. I’ll probably go back to band at some point, or go to band - I never taught it – but I don’t know. I definitely don’t want to do marching band. It’s a lot of work.

Q. When you came here, were there any band positions available?
A. Not that I was aware of. It really didn’t tell what schools were hiring. I didn’t know that stuff. All I knew was that they were hiring music teachers.

Q. Did they know your background, student teaching with strings?
A. I think they did. I had that preliminary interview with just a random principal, and I’m sure they took that information down. But my principal knew my background.

Q. Why are so many band teachers taking string positions?
A. I think that more kids that are interested in going on into teaching are in band than in strings. That’s one thing that I’ve really noticed in the past few years. The students that are in strings as opposed to the students that are in band, especially at the high school level, are completely different kinds of kids. Their character is completely different, their attitudes. There are some that are the same. Regardless if they got in band or in strings, they would still have that same personality. When you’re in band, you can’t do a lot of sports because they’re conflicting. As opposed to orchestra where there’s really no after-school stuff for orchestra. You have occasional concerts or festivals, but like with marching band, to be in band you have to be a marcher in high school because that’s kind of how high school is set up and all those fall sports you can’t do, and that’s a lot of sports. Cross country, girl’s soccer, football...

Q. That’s interesting. So you feel that people have to be more committed to band, therefore it becomes a bigger part of their life?
A. Yeah, band’s a huge commitment. I just think the personality of kids that are in band, you know it’s a big commitment, so they’re there, they’re in band, they really enjoy band, so they go on to teach it.
String Professor A Interview

Q. The purpose of this interview is to investigate your opinion and approach toward non-string students in string methods classes in music colleges/universities.
A. You need to know that I am one of those people as well.

Q. You are? You’re a non-string teacher?
A. Well I started, initially, as a non-string player. I did not have a string background when I went to college. However, I decided, well actually right away, but very early on in my undergrad time that I didn’t really want to be a band teacher. I loved orchestra. I had always wanted to play violin - or strings, let’s just say- but I didn’t get to start in the settings I was in. I also had no - at that time in my life - I had no mentor or model of a woman band teacher, which didn’t occur to me at the time, but in retrospect I think it may have played some role. But frankly, I loved strings. And though I was a flute player, I just really wanted to be in orchestra and teaching orchestra and strings. So I worked really hard as an undergrad to better qualify myself in strings. You never catch up - you’re never going to be a performer on a string instrument unless maybe you take maybe two or three years out of your life. I’m not sure, because others have done better than I have - but, anyway, I started working intensely, far more than other people would on violin and on strings as an undergrad, so I graduated with a K-12 general instrumental certification, but I definitely looked for string jobs or string and wind jobs and pretty much did that for all of my public school time, although eventually I got entirely into strings.

Q. How long did you teach in public schools?
A. Twelve years, approximately. I taught in ________, band and orchestra ________, band and orchestra but eventually all strings, and I also taught high school orchestra in ________. So, actually my background does bear on the question, I think, because I’ve worked and had more background on violin - at least after my undergrad years - than most would because I was intending on teaching strings. But recognizing how far behind I was, even with that, I pursued a master’s degree, which I now actually oversee in my position at ________ university. It’s called a string development degree. It requires playing proficiency on all four instruments at approximately high school level, but it varies, depending on the person’s background. And it emphasizes pedagogy. Not necessarily music education pedagogy, but string pedagogy; teaching all four instruments. I also was the beneficiary of a workshop that I have since run, although it’s not currently scheduled, and that was called the National
String Workshop. NSW was conceived by my mentor and predecessor, and this is a name you should know because this is somebody who is committed to the same topic you’re looking at, and his name is Marvin Rabin. He conceived the NSW as a place for string teachers, public and private teachers, to enhance their skills and gain pedagogy/knowledge. And it always has violin, viola, cello, and bass study classes at beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. So someone like me could, summer after summer, take violin, viola, cello, and bass in classes. These are group settings. And then work on skills that we learned or had been introduced to during the year, and then hopefully over the course of some summers, increase my skills. And so I did that for many summers, and then I did the string development master’s degree. And there are a number of people like me. I don’t know who’s on your list of people to call, Jim Kjelland, um, now I’m drawing a bunch of blanks, but that string development degree is the background for several of us who are now in higher education who wanted to be good string teachers but started as wind players.

Q. So, you have a master’s degree in flute performance and string development?
A. Yes, both. And I have a Ph.D. in Music Education. Let me just say that I picked the University of Texas because of the string project there, so I was able to teach in a program with pre-college students and a lot of other people who were interested in string teaching, and anyway, that’s why I picked the University of Texas. But let me be clear that in all that, I still remain sort of a non-string player because I didn’t have artist-level skills anywhere and that’s part of the reality, at least of my experience. It still put me in something of a hybrid category. I call myself a hybrid, when people ask, ‘Well, what’s your performance degree?’ In my job at _______ University, I am in the string area, classified in the string area. I’m responsible for pedagogy for all kinds of teaching settings, private and public school, but I am not in music ed., so I’m not exclusively involved with people who are getting certification. One of your written points in the email made me think that it would be useful to define how, at least our school does some of this teaching. By that I mean music ed. faculty are responsible for instrumental methods. That’s a semester of elementary instrumental methods and a semester of secondary instrumental methods. Those are pre-requisite to student teaching, so of course all students who are getting certified have to take those classes. I do team-teach, depending on if there are string players in those classes who are clearly going to be orchestra teachers, and also to address those who do not intend to. In that methods class setting, I go in and teach - depending what we work into the schedule - a session on teaching strings in school from a public school point of view. We also have what we call string fundamentals. Some schools call them techniques. In fundamentals, we’re primarily charged with skill development, so that’s where I have the music ed. instrumental majors learning string techniques. We do a 2-course sequence: High strings one semester, low strings one semester. Each of those is a different course.

Q. Are they both required?
A. They’re both required unless you’re a string player. If you’re an upper string player, you’re required to take lower strings, and usually people will - let’s say you’re a violin player - instead of taking upper strings, they will take one of my other pedagogy classes. And that brings me to my other pedagogy classes which are required for performance
majors, optional for music ed. majors, because they have so many other requirements, and in those classes we focus entirely on the topic of string pedagogy. It may vary according to what the make up of the class is. If there are all violinists that’s one thing, if it’s all violin, viola, cello, bass, that’s another thing. It may vary a little bit, but that’s where I’m able to work exclusively with string pedagogy. I have two practicum settings. We don’t have a string project, but I have a collaborative project with community music programs where we teach beginners, or young children, pre-4th and 5th grade. You can infer that it’s a minority population and generally an under-served, under-privileged population. So I bring students who are interested to that center and they teach, but also learn from not me but different master teachers. So that’s one practicum setting. And the other practicum settings that I use are non-music majors who are in college, and I do chamber music with them sometimes. OK, different sidebar. Another part of my job is the non-auditioned orchestras. So I have approximately 250 students in two orchestras who rehearse once a week, we play once a semester. I have this big pool of non-major string players, many of who want to do chamber music and I use music majors to coach those chamber groups. So that’s the other practicum setting that I use.

Q. And when you say music majors, would that include both performance and music ed.?
A. Anybody who wants to coach. I don’t draw lines at all. In my whole life, I try to blur those boundaries.

Q. Who is in charge of your string methods?
A. By methods, because we have different components to methods. A music ed. person is in charge of inst methods. I may assist, but that’s somebody else, an instrumental music ed. professor’s course load. And like I said, I have string, what we call fundamentals, because fund are oriented toward pub school I certainly do a lot of contextual stuff, budgets for schools, and things like that, but my emphasis is perhaps a little more on the instrument than on the program.

Q. Some of the responses from my survey stated the participant wished they had more work on the certain instruments in string methods class, particularly the bass. How do you find your string methods courses covering all instruments?
A. It’s ok. It’s not adequate, but as I said earlier, ______ has such an enormous credit requirement for certification. We’re really tied when it comes to expanding things to be what we think they ought to be. So generally, when I said high strings, that means 2/3rds of the semester on violin, 1/3 on the viola, and the low-strings class will be approx 2/3 cello, 1/3 bass. So, it’s not enough, but it’s what I have.

Q. Do the non-string and string majors take a different approach to your string methods class?
A. Well, let me answer it this way. I know in some places and in some states and some localities there’s a huge rift between band and orchestra. So there are band attitudes that are not accepting of strings, or real territorial, I know school programs like that, and this is my point. They don’t really come into our program that way. It’s hard to get into __________ University. Academically and performance. For the most part, for the
audition, we may look at what the intended major is, but everybody’s got to play well enough to get in. And that’s pretty high in all areas. But my point is, most of the students who are in inst music ed. are very serious musicians, wind players, I mean. They’re playing in orchestra, they understand a sort of comprehensive music ed. program, and I don’t have really any of that band geek attitude of “I’m only going to band, and orchestra is nowhere”. They’re pretty practical minded and I think a lot of them have had teachers who did both. So, generally, the attitude is good. Now certainly, wind player or percussion skills are not going to be generally the right/left hand, the independence of the hand, the motion of the bow… All of that is probably new to them, especially compared to their other fundamental classes where they’re playing a double reed or they’re playing another instrument that’s sort of in the same family… so I emphasize that with them because it may put them closer to the experience that a child is having. Whereas a string player is going to pick up an instrument and have certain skills already built in. But probably often a harder skill is to differentiate and not play a cello like a violinist, or understand that the cello bow is not like a violin bow and how to hold it differently, and generally they’re going to be ahead. So the challenges for me, as in any public school classroom, is to find ways to individualize – so to speak – to make sure that the string major who is likely going to do this, who needs to understand how his or her peers are learning or not learning the instrument. I expect them to be observing those kind of things, as well as working ahead of where I would expect a non-string player to be.

Q. Have you ever noticed a non-string student approach a string concept differently than a string player? For example, based on conversations with band teachers, I have heard that they use a lot of rhythm in their daily lessons. So, perhaps something a band student learned in band that transferred over to strings.

A. I do in general think that band method books teach rhythm reading better or more quickly or more consistently than many string approaches. However, I think a couple of things. One would be learning by ear and so-called rote learning let’s just by aural model. Let me first address the aural thing. Because in an ideal world I want young string player be learning sounds and I do believe in the efficacy of, for instance that part of Suzuki’s approach of the mother–tongue, of having an aural model in your head that sort of is the model you’re after on the instrument, whether it’s the tune or the sound and frankly, if I can criticize myself as a wind player, I never had enough of that kind of thing. Playing without the notes, without the distraction of the visual to learn by ear, to listen to the sound, to make as good a sound as you can, but then to go to symbol which is to say rhythm reading and pitch reading and make sure that that’s incorporated all the way along but not necessarily all together. The symbol part of it can be addressed effectively and consistently and simultaneously, but not necessarily when you’re trying to teach right hand and left hand and tone produce skills, not at the same time. I’m a pretty big believer in separation of skills and also putting them together but understanding separation and sequence and then putting them together. And putting notes in front of a kids always distracts from everything you’ve accomplished position-wise, tone-wise, it always does. So, I’m a really big proponent of separating-synthesizing, separating-synthesizing. Specifically on rhythm. And this does go back to the aural approach. Now if I want to teach Mississippi Hotdog or whatever you want to say for 4 16th notes
and 2 8ths. And I usually teach that as *detache* back and forth and then stopped bow. Anyway, I wouldn’t be teaching a flute player 16\(^{th}\) notes at the out-set, so I do think that there is, in the nature of the string instrument itself, and the bow, there are some pretty complex rhythms that I would teach from the very get-go. 4 16\(^{th}\) notes and 2 8ths. I might very well start winds more appropriately with quarter notes and half notes and whole notes, or that kind of approach, going from whole unit to part unit. On a string instrument I’d go ahead and start with the 16ths, with a part-unit.

Q. So based on the instrument, whether it’s a string or wind, you’d start with different rhythms and concepts?
A. Yeah, like a half note or a whole note on a violin is a whole different issue than it is on a flute. A whole different issue. I see the possibilities for teaching rhythms quite differently with the strings.

Q. Do you address purchasing and repairing instrument in your string fundamentals class?
A. Usually purchasing, a lot of the budgeting part of this takes place in that instrumental methods class. I do deal with maintenance and repair to some extent and I do make some recommendations about brands and purchases or procedures, so I guess the answer is Yes to both things.

Q. Do you teach how to choose appropriate literature?
A. Yes.

Q. How do you teach large groups? Many string methods classes learn instruments individually.
A. Group teaching is a huge part of what I’m a proponent of, whether it’s for schools or whether its for private teachers. I don’t pretend, though, that a heterogeneous group - violin, viola, cello, bass - in 4\(^{th}\) grade with 17 kids once a week is an effective setting. I don’t at all endorse that. If a public school program or teacher can find a way to teach violin or violin and viola, to teach cello, to teach bass at least until kids know what they’re doing, in spite of the fact that we have pretty good method books to teach all 4 instruments at once, I just think its unlikely that those kids can develop the kind of foundational skills that will carry them forward.

Q. As for as technique goes, how far do you teach in your classes? Do you teach vibrato or advanced bowing technique? Or anything a teacher would need to know who is teaching, say, high school strings?
A. We do ‘pre’ things for shifting and vibrato. I want them to understand those skills at intermediate and advanced levels, but more than that I want them to understand how the foundation prepares those skills, so in some ways, yes, we’re doing shifting from the get-go, using harmonics, using slides and shuttles around the fingerboard. We’re doing things that set up the vibrato motion. Do they come out of my class with a vibrato? Ehnh, not usually, no. But are they set up? I hope so that they can eventually develop a vibrato and skills and bowing skills, I hope so. And I hope they understand their responsibility to a child in that way.
Q. What type of performance skills do you expect a student to have at the end of your course?
A. I expect them to produce a good characteristic, solid tone that’s beautiful. I expect them to, if not play in tune, to understand and adjust. I mean I want them to play in tune, of course, but if an adjustment is to be made, I expect them to understand how to make that adjustment. I expect them to understand the finger patterns and hand shapes that produce good intonation. I expect them to have a concept of fingerboard geography. Even though I don’t expect them to play every note on the fingerboard yet in tune, I expect them to understand how the strings relate to each other and how intonation is affected across string and from finger to finger. I expect them to have a good bow hold - good to excellent - I’d like that, anyway. And I expect them to develop foundational reading skills. Again, because they’re all trained musicians, that’s kind of a given. I also expect them to be able to compose and arrange for strings at the beginning level.

Q. What type of teaching skills do you expect your students to have at the end of the course?
A. Well, I have very little time to have them do much teaching in front of the class, but to go back to my concept of separate-sequence-synthesize, I expect them to be able to look at a tune, an exercise, whatever, and understand what the main teaching challenges are, how they’re going to sequence them, what to expect to have to work on with a student, and I expect them to at least have some skills in how to take that apart and then put it back together, and in what order.

Q. How do you feel about non-string teachers teaching strings?
A. I think it’s absolutely necessary. I think some of the best string teachers in the county are in fact wind players. I do think that there is huge responsibility involved, as there is in teaching anything. If you respect what it is you’re teaching, and realize that what you teach to a child or what a child learns from you governs his or her future in music, you must understand where you have to compensate for what you don’t know. And I don’t mean that to put people off from teaching strings, but I want them to take it seriously, especially in school settings where administratively they’re probably not taking it too seriously, like, ‘Oh, you’re an instrumental music teacher. You can do band, orchestra, whatever’. But I don’t go to the other end of it which some string programs do and say, ‘Well, you can’t teach here unless you’re an artist-level string player’.

Q. What are the most essential techniques a non-string major needs to know to be a successful string teachers?
A. They need to accept responsibility for their own learning and also for the students learning. And learning and mastery. They need to be good colleagues. They need to be enthusiastic, not necessarily in this order. I might put enthusiasm first.

Q. In your position, do you get requests from non-string teachers teaching strings to come and help them?
A. Yes
Q. Can you generalize the most common questions?
A. Depending on the level that they’re teaching, rehearsal techniques, sometimes looking at the score but seeing it as the student sees the parts and what the challenges are for each instrument in the score. Being able to see that in their score but being able to translate that to the students. But I guess that goes back to rehearsal techniques. Their own skills, of course. Sometimes its classroom management and strategies for being efficient, tuning, things like that. It varies on the levels.

Q. Is correct to say that the issues they have are similar to problems a string player teaching string would have?
A. Often yes.
APPENDIX G

STRING PROFESSOR B INTERVIEW

Q. What is your primary/secondary position title and definition?
A. State University professor of music

Q. How many years have you been in this position?
A. 24

Q. What is your experience/background in string education? Do you have any public school teaching experience?
A. Yes, taught in both public and private k-12 schools prior to teaching at the university level.

Q. Is string methods class a requirement for all instrumental music education majors at your school?
A. yes

Q. Who is responsible for your string methods class instruction? (Is it you, a graduate student, or other?)
A. We have two sections of the course. I teach one section and graduate doctoral students in string music education teach the other section using my lesson plans. The doctoral students watch me teach the morning section and then try to imitate in their afternoon section.

Q. What is length in time (semesters) of your string methods class?
A. We are on the 10-week quarter system, not semester system. 2 quarters of string methods are required of all undergraduate instrument music education majors. Because of the quarter system the classes meet 4 days a week rather than the typical 2 or 3 per week in semester schools.

Q. What is your response to current string teachers who claim their string methods course in undergrad was not long enough to learn the skills they thought were necessary in order to get through their first year of teaching?
A. They should take additional string teaching courses and private lessons on string instruments.
Q. Do you teach each instrument (violin, viola, cello, bass) separately? How much time (weeks, semesters) is spent on each instrument?
A. Students spend 5 weeks on each of the four string instruments. Then there is an elective third quarter class for students to receive an additional 10 weeks of instruction.

Q. Do your classes contain both string and non-string music education students? If so, are there differences between the two groups in their attitudes/approaches toward the class?
A. Typically the string education majors are initially more interested in the course content than the non-string majors. The goal is to increase the non-major string instrument major’s attitude so that by the end of their methods experience there is no difference between string and non-string majors.

Q. The way you or the instructor approaches their instruction?
A. No difference

Q. Have any non-string majors ever approached string techniques with band or other non-string instrument skills/techniques? Please explain.
A. I am sorry I do not understand the question.

Q. What are the main objectives of your string methods class curriculum?
A. Purpose is to develop the string skills necessary and knowledge and understanding of resources necessary for successful string instruction in the schools.

Q. Do they include any of the following: purchasing and repairing instruments, choosing appropriate literature, large group instruction, advanced middle school or high school techniques (vibrato, shifting, bow technique, etc)?
A. Yes (to all)

Q. What type of performance/teaching skills do you expect a student to possess at the end of the string methods course?
A. Skills to play well through the end of a typical school string class teaching book 1 and minimal advanced playing skills including shifting, vibrato, and spiccato.

Q. What is your opinion toward non-string teachers teaching string?
A. Many are very successful and I support them. However, those teaching strings in the schools who are non-string players need to develop the skills to successful become a string educator in the schools.

Q. How can they be better prepared to teach strings? (What are the most essential techniques/characteristic traits/attitudes a non-string major needs to know to be a successful string teacher?)
A. Attend string teaching workshops and take private lessons on string instruments regularly. Competencies and skills and attitudes necessary for successful string teaching have been established by ASTA and published by ASTA. See astaweb.com for a copy.
Q. Do you get requests from non-string teachers teaching in the string classroom for assistance?
A. Yes

Q. If so, what are the most common questions they ask? What do you find to be their greatest difficulties?
A. The most difficulty they have is playing the instruments. How to play the instrument is the most common question.
APPENDIX H

FREE RESPONSE SURVEY QUESTIONS 9 AND 10

Non-String Teacher

1. For some, the information presented in string methods courses was sufficient to get through the first year:
   - It was concentrated to help us through the first year
   - Everything was there to get us started and well into the year
   - I had the basic skills needed to start the year — I grew with the students
   - Knowing basic methods of string playing
   - Good basic foundation but would have loved more
   - Got me started until I could learn
   - I was familiar with proper bow grip and technique

2. The string methods courses did not contain enough information to prepare non-string majors to teach strings at the high school or an advanced middle school level:
   - Did not cover vibrato and shifting
   - The class was organized as a hands-on 6th grade beginning strings class, so I was never exposed to more advanced techniques (shifting, vibrato, etc)
   - It was focused more on middle school teaching than high school
   - More advanced skills would have been nice
   - The class needed to be about more than just how to start a string student off. I started teaching HS orchestra this year with no knowledge of shifting or advanced bowing, and had to figure out how to teach these things on my own without being able to model or demonstrate myself (I am a saxophone player)
   - Teaching advanced string technique i.e. high school level playing
   - There were no advanced string study, no tech. or literature beyond the 2nd year level. I teach high school now and would have liked at least some info.
   - Bow technique ala Jeland [sic]
   - Insufficient time spent on the different type of articulations
3. The string methods class was not long enough to learn sufficient skills to teach strings in a school rehearsal setting
   - Play all instruments, have it more than 1 semester, maybe include guitar / More time. Maybe more credit hours
   - More time with each instrument. Include bass
   - More time on each instrument

   String Teacher

1. The skills learned by string majors in string methods classes filled in the gaps of their overall string knowledge:
   - Fingering in cello and bass were very important
   - Taught me the basics on cello and bass
   - I have used a lot of the cello/bass stuff
   - I needed the experience on the bass and viola
   - I didn’t know how to even hold a cello or bass correctly
   - Reading different clefs, bow hold, violin-violad vs. cello-bass
   - General knowledge specific to each instrument

2. The skills learned by string majors in string methods classes were not applicable to their first year of teaching because they didn’t match real-life teaching scenarios:
   - AGE:
     - Teaching teenagers and teaching college students is totally different
     - More exposure to young students
     - Volunteer time in middle and HS programs especially in the beginning and end of the school year
     - Teach the college students like they are 6th grader
   - TEACHING LARGE STRING CLASS SIZE:
     - It didn’t show how to teach a string class
     - I needed more on group teaching these, not just individual
     - Focus on successful strategies for heterogeneous instruction, especially in testing
     - Do more group teaching classes for beginning strings
     - Would be nice if it was a “lab” based kind of thing in an actual classroom
     - There are many problems specific to teaching string that were never addressed: position, logistics in classroom, management, class sizes, simplifying concepts, identifying what should be taught in what order, etc.
• GENERAL/ MISC. STRING ISSUES:
  - Teach how to size and fit better
  - Teacher- orchestra on secondary instrument like Loyola University
  - More focus on lesson plan design geared towards music
  - I wish we focused more on how to teach the instruments rather than learning how to play only

3. The string methods class was not long enough to learn sufficient skills to teach strings in a school rehearsal setting:

  • I think music ed. majors intending to teach strings should have at least 2 semesters of undergrad. string methods classes – 1 semester just isn’t enough
  • Make them longer if possible. 1 semester was not enough
  • More time on each instrument

4. Attitude toward non-string majors in string methods classes:

  • The string majors should always be involved in the instruction for non-string majors – perhaps have a project the others don’t have
  • Teach non-string players how to tune
  • Do not let non-string players teach strings!
REFERENCES


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