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Engaging the Adult Learner in Studio Violin Lessons

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by

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Music has an important role in nearly every adult life. For most, their participation in music involves listening to recordings, attending concerts, or driving their children to music lessons and rehearsals. According to a 2009 Gallup poll, 85 percent of adults in the United States who do not play a musical instrument wish they had learned to play one. Of those adults, 69 percent would like to play an instrument now. However, a 2012 National Endowment for the Arts survey found that only 12 percent of adult Americans were currently playing musical instruments (Nathan 2018). The primary focus of American music education lies in the K-12 school system, yet only 20 percent of adults in the United States participated in formal music education programs during their high school years (Edgar et al. 2015, 375). At the same time, many adults are hesitant to approach learning an instrument because they are aware that the majority of musical learning materials and methods are geared towards children. They may have seen images of tiny children playing on fractional violins, and have heard that children are like “sponges” who easily absorb information. Contrary to these beliefs, research suggests that there is no reason that adults cannot be as successful at playing an instrument as children. In fact, in many ways, adults are positioned to be more successful musicians, due to their life experiences, self-motivation, and self-concept for learning.

While much of the existing literature regarding adult music students includes discussions of ensemble participation, such as New Horizons orchestras and folk or fiddle groups, this paper is focused on private studio lessons, primarily in the classical style. As a private violin and viola studio teacher in Boulder, Colorado, I was fortunate to build a studio that included 12 adult beginners. Primarily, these were adults working in the thriving tech sector who had free time and disposable income, allowing them to pursue playing an instrument for the first time. The most common resources for adult beginners are aimed at retirees, but adults of all ages can benefit

from private lessons. This document explores how studio teachers can best serve and retain adult students. Teaching adults can not only be emotionally rewarding, it also presents a market for the enterprising studio teacher, if the instructor is aware of the several unique aspects of teaching adult beginners which I will introduce in this document.

In this document, I will discuss adult learning concepts, including lifelong learning and andragogy. Along with introducing concepts and relevant research, I will incorporate examples from my experiences teaching violin to adult learners. Additionally, I will explore why adults are motivated to learn to play instruments, as well as the possible benefits of learning a musical instrument. Furthermore, working with adult students offers benefits to the private instructor. However, teaching adults can present challenges to the studio teacher, who must be flexible and adopt the role of facilitator. Use of various studio strategies may aid the instructor in creating a productive learning environment. Oftentimes, adults are interested in the social opportunities that ensemble playing provides, but are not ready to play in front of others initially. I will explore how studio teachers can create a community and studio culture in order to fulfill adult students' desire for social interaction. In addition, I discuss the physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges that adults can present, as well as strategies for accommodating these challenges and a variety of learning styles. Finally, I will present a suggested progression for adult violin learning during the first year of instruction.

Adult Learning Concepts

Lifelong Learning

The demographics of American society are changing. The average life expectancy in the United States has increased, which has “significant implications for lifelong learning” (Myers et al. 2013, 134). According to the 2000 census, adults outnumbered children under eighteen years

of age “for the first time in history” (Myers et al. 2013, 135). The 2007 Summit on Global Aging reported that seniors over the age of 65 will account for one eighth of the global population by 2030, and estimates indicate that “by the middle of the twenty-first century, approximately seventy-nine million senior adults will make up 20 percent of the total population in the United States” (Myers et al. 2013, 136). As the demographics of society shift, music education should adjust accordingly. Traditionally, music education in the United States has been focused on K-12 school systems (Myers et al. 2013, 136). As a result, a large portion of the population is currently underserved by music educators. The National Association for Music Education “has long called for adult teaching and learning in the mission of the organization” (Myers et al. 2013, 136).

Many adults value lifelong learning, both in building upon existing skills and learning new skills. The term “learning society” was introduced in the late twentieth century to “suggest that continuity of learning over a lifetime is essential both to personal and societal well-being. Such learning may be formal or informal, self-regulated or obtained through formal program delivery, and related to professional and career development or diverse areas of personal fulfillment” (Myers et al. 2013, 134-135). Today, “Ongoing professional and career learning as well as leisure, health, and self-help learning are now recognized as important dimensions of a positive and productive adulthood. Some learning represents a continuation and upgrading of current knowledge, while other learning delves into new areas for the first time” (Myers et al. 2013, 134). Continuing education experts David Myers, Chelcy Bowles, and Will Dabback suggest that we should view music education as a “lifespan endeavor, rather than as something that occurs during childhood and adolescence as a precursor to lifelong participation” (Myers et al. 2013, 135). In fact, the final report of the Tanglewood Symposium of 1968 advocated that “music should be offered to adults both for instrumental purposes, to satisfy psychological,

religious, and vocational needs, and for expressive purposes, to help each individual find means for self-realization, either as a creator or as participant audience” (Myers et. al 2013, 135). In addition, the National Association for Music Education (MENC) produced a paper on adult and continuing music education that listed “self-realization, human relations, enrichment of family life, sustaining and improving health, and improvement of occupational competence” (Myers et al. 2013, 135) as objectives in 1974. Myers, Bowles, and Dabback argue that adulthood should be viewed not “in terms of stasis and decline, but rather as a time of continuing growth influenced by life experiences, education, and many other variables” (Myers et al. 2013, 135). There are many opportunities for formal music education and music making while in school, but opportunities become scarce when entering the workforce.

“After high school or college graduation, adults find several reasons to stop music participation. Careers and family tend to top the list, along with not being able to justify extra time to sing in choirs or practice their instruments. But once the children are grown and retirement is in the foreseeable future, those who fondly recall their earlier music making days might be tempted to dust off those instruments or reignite those vocal chords” (Edgar et al. 2015, 376).

In addition, adults who did not participate in formal music programs during their school days may wish to do so later in life.

Andragogy

Training for educators is often focused on pedagogy, but few private instructors are familiar with the term andragogy. Most educators participate in string pedagogy and string methods courses during their studies. “Pedagogy” refers to teaching youth and “andragogy refers to the study of adult education and learning strategies” (Edgar et al. 2015, 368). Scott N. Edgar and Linda A. Hartley note that due to the aging of society, “increased attention to andragogy is warranted” (Edgar et al. 2015, 368). In *The modern practice of adult education: Andragogy versus pedagogy*, M. S. Knowles developed an andragogical process model in contrast to a

pedagogical content model. “The content model is concerned with transmitting information and skills, whereas the process model is concerned with providing procedures and resources for helping learners acquire information and skills” (Edgar et al. 2015, 385). When utilizing the process model, Knowles, Holton, and Swanton outline the following steps:

“(1) prepare the learner; (2) establish a climate conducive to learning; (3) create a mechanism for mutual planning; (4) diagnose the needs for learning; (5) formulate program objects (content) that will satisfy these needs; (6) design a pattern of learning experiences; (7) conduct these learning experiences with suitable techniques and materials; and (8) evaluate the learning outcomes and re-diagnose learning needs” (Edgar et al. 2015, 385).

The following table, quoted from Edgar, effectively summarizes the differences between common pedagogical and andragogical assumptions and approaches:

Assumption	Pedagogy	Andragogy
The need to know	Learners need to know only that they must learn what the teacher teaches to pass and get promoted.	Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.
The learners' self-concept	The teacher's concept of the learner is that of a dependent personality; therefore the learner becomes a dependent personality.	Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives.
The role of the learners' prior experiences	The learners' experience is of little worth as a resource for learning. What counts is the experience of the teacher, and resource materials.	Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from that of youths.
Readiness to learn	Learners become ready to learn what the teacher tells them they must if they want to pass and get promoted.	Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations.
Orientation to learning	Learners have a subject-centered orientation to learning; they see learning as acquired subject matter content.	Adults are life-centered in their orientation to learning.
Motivation to learn	Learners are motivated to learn by external motivators (grades, teachers' approval or disapproval, parental pressures).	Adults are responsive to some external motivators (jobs, promotions), but the most potent motivators are internal pressure (self-esteem, quality of life).

Source: Edgar et. al 2015, 365

Motivations for Music Engagement

The reasons for engagement in musical activities through adulthood have been categorized into three areas: “personal motivations (such as creativity and leisure), musical motivations (that include love of music and performing), and social motivations (related group

participation and friendship)” (Myers et. al 2013, 136). In my experience, students often begin private lessons after a major life change. Katrina Wreede agrees, and lists possible reasons including “a new career, moving, a divorce or death, quitting an unrewarding job, going back to school, [or] a burning hunger for self-expression.” (Wreede 2000, 41). Additionally, adults “may realize the physical, social, and emotional benefits of active music making and take needed steps to maintain and improve their health” (Edgar et al. 2015, 384). As Ros Stephen writes, “learning an instrument can open up a wealth of new opportunities: music enables us to express ourselves in a new way, offers opportunities to meet new people, and provides an outlet for creativity” (Stephen 2018, 50).

Some adults begin taking lessons because they finally have the time and resources they lacked when they were younger to pursue playing an instrument. In my experience, adult students may not have had the opportunity to learn an instrument during their own school years, but supported their children’s pursuit of music education. When parents approach or reach retirement, they may decide that they too can experience the benefits of playing an instrument. For instance, my student Dan, 63, grew up an avid BMX biker. He became successful as a business owner, and provided his son with instruments and lessons. Dan and his wife frequently attended student and professional concerts at the local university, and Dan was an avid classical public radio listener. His son eventually became a band director and drumline instructor. As his son finished college and Dan approached retirement, it was his turn. His wife presented him with a violin and private lessons as a Christmas gift.

Many adults pursue learning an instrument for the social benefits. The majority of articles and studies regarding adult music learning focus on retirees, partially because adult social circles are often based on our employment communities. Pursuing music learning opportunities can help

ease the transition into retirement. After tying their identity and social circles to their career, “Emotionally, senior adults can struggle finding a new identity after retirement. Recreating themselves as a musician can offer an emotional outlet for these feelings” (Edgar et al. 2015, 384). Various articles regarding adult music learning focus on fiddle groups and ensembles, like New Horizons Ensemble, because of the social aspect of group learning. Retired adults who join these ensembles “may be looking for social activities to meet new friends and feel an integral part of a group, and fill the void of their previous job or career” (Edgar et al. 2015, 384). In addition to retirees, many adults experience isolation from traditional social channels because they work from home. Even though private lessons are one-on-one, they do provide social benefits. Frequently, adults enjoy having a standing appointment with another adult and seeing a friendly face. Spending a few minutes chatting at the beginning or end of each lesson can bookend learning a skill with social interaction. Instructors can also provide opportunities for group interaction outside the regular lesson time.

In addition to expanding their social lives, adults pursue music to craft their personal identity. Many adults who seek musical instruction want to redefine themselves as “musical people.” As adults, our identity often revolves around our career, our familial role, and our leisure activities. We consider ourselves moms, dads, runners, swimmers, readers, “foodies,” travelers, and musicians. After retiring as a social worker, my student, Mary, takes violin, guitar, and piano lessons. Though she is fortunate that her husband is able to support her as the director at a Carnegie library, her pension is modest, and affords her one lesson on each instrument per month. Mary doesn’t expect to be amazing at all three instruments, but does not want to miss her chance to be a musician. She has dedicated one corner in her condominium to her practice space,

decorated with fingering charts and posters of music terms. Her hope is to eventually play *The Devil Went Down to Georgia*.

Benefits of Music Learning for Adult Students

Learning to play an instrument offers numerous benefits. “Research suggests that adults who participate in music activities perceive benefits in their health, quality of life, mental well-being, and social connections” (Myers et al. 2013, 143). Like learning a new language or completing Sudoku puzzles, learning an instrument can help to keep the mind sharp. With so many of our daily activities taking place on screens, adults are looking for opportunities to unplug. My student, Tina, works in fungal genomics and spends the majority of her work day at a computer. She experienced a period of frustration with her progress, and feared she would not be able to continue justifying the monthly expense of private lessons and renting an instrument. However, Tina felt that the expense was warranted when she remembered that she enjoys practicing the violin because it is her one hobby free from technology. Before taking up the violin, she spent her free time dabbling in graphic design, primarily creating electronic portraits of dogs and cats as *veladoras*. In addition to her continued violin practice, Tina recently added whittling wooden spoons to her activities.

Adults cope with hectic schedules and busy lives, and many seek mindfulness-based activities as a way to relax. Physicians encourage mindfulness-based activities, which can include playing an instrument, for their stress relief and health benefits, including lowering blood pressure and aiding sleep. Students can appreciate the role of musical practice as a form of mindfulness in their daily routines. For instance, Arlene prefers to spend an hour each morning with her scales and coffee at 6 AM. Her only concern is that she may wake the neighbors across

the courtyard. Finding the oasis of meditative practice can help motivate students to practice and continue with their instruments. Emily Wright calls this the “unexpected lure of practice”:

“You know that fabulous Zen feeling you get after playing for 45 minutes? Well, most people don’t. So, we need to be very perceptive and guide our students into that peaceful, single-focus frame of mind. This kind of focus is not only the best way to get real practicing done, but also provides a wonderful mental vacation that I have found keeps adult students looking forward to their practice time. It becomes a way to relax instead of an addition to the stresses of the day, and is frequently the only time they spend doing something for themselves” (Wright 2007, 90).

Many students will find the oasis on their own. To aid those that have not experienced this meditative state for the first time, Wright recommends turning the metronome down to 42 beats per minute and playing the “world’s slowest scale” with your student while reminding them to breathe.

“Have them close their eyes and ask them to hear the next note in the scale before they play it. Also encourage them to play on the back side of the beat. People uneasy with what they are doing tend to rush, which only increases anxiety. The best thing about getting students to play slowly is that they can check numerous aspects of technique and make corrections in a non-anxious way. Then, as they speed up, that calm frame of mind stays with them” (Wright 2007, 90).

After a long work day, my student Dan finds that practicing the violin helps him to close the door on his work day and decompress. Like Mary, Dan has established a space in his home dedicated to his violin practice. He commutes from his home office to his garage “Dan Cave” to practice the violin and to have his weekly online lessons. He feels that his violin practice gives him a chance to engage his “right brain” after using his “left brain” all day.

Self-Motivation

The work of learning how to play the violin is never done, and perfection is unattainable. This is why learning an instrument is fulfilling yet frustrating. Once adults start taking lessons, they can be extremely self-motivated, and learning an instrument can enhance many aspects of their lives. Myers, Bowles, and Dabback sum it up well:

“Among those who pursue music avocationally, or for enhancing the quality of their lives, the opportunity to increase understanding, skills, and expressive capacity through music can be a continually unfolding process of inquiry and discovery that yields motivation to continue, a sense of achievement, inherent aesthetic fulfillment, and a positive socialization within and across age groups. In addition, music learning affords opportunities in areas such as creativity, dexterity, and aural perception that may positively influence other cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains” (Myers et al. 2013, 135).

While learning music is fulfilling and offers numerous benefits, including a chance to meet others with similar interests and “emotional, mental, and physical development” (Wreede 2000, 41), it is certainly not easy. Adults are often very motivated, but as teachers we are there to help when they are not, in order to help make music a part of their daily life. Wreede describes the role of the teacher as getting students “through the novelty period and [to] help them build a lifetime habit of music. Without a parent to drive them to lessons, monitor practice, and write checks, students rely completely on the teacher for useful criticism and enthusiastic confidence building” (Wreede 2000, 41).

Benefits of Adult Music Learning for Teachers

Numerous articles discuss the difficulties of working with adult students for teachers. In her article *Adult Students: Why Bother?* Mary Schallert describes a phenomenon that I have encountered myself: teachers who prefer to teach children and will no longer accept adult students because they are “too difficult to work with.” The majority of these perceived difficulties stem from teachers’ training and available materials. Most private instructors began playing their instruments as children, either in school, community music programs, or privately through programs such as the Suzuki Method. When teaching beginners, we often think back to our own beginner experiences. Existing pedagogical methods are primarily geared towards children, notably the Suzuki, Rolland, and O’Connor Methods. Regardless of whatever challenges working with adults presents, teaching adults can have pedagogical and practical

benefits for the private instructor. Adults may be able to fill private lesson slots when younger students are unavailable by taking lessons later in the evening, after children are winding down for bed. Retirees and adults with flexible work schedules are also able to fill daytime slots that would normally be available only to pre-school or homeschooled children. Working with adults requires private teachers to exercise different “muscles” and strengthens their teaching. Adults are inquisitive and observant. As a result, I have found that when working with adults, teachers must make clear and concise statements. When teaching an adult, the instructor must know and be able to express *why* we do things the way that we do. In addition, adults are more self-sufficient and can often accomplish more in their personal practice sessions when provided with clear instructions. Nick Cootes, a cello instructor for the East London Late Starters’ Orchestra, writes: “You can go into a lot more detail with an adult than a child on what they should do and why. It takes a bit longer, but once they understand it they can work on it better themselves” (Homfray 2008, 33).

Abstract Ideas and Musicianship

Ros Stephen has been teaching violin to adult beginners and “improvers” for over 15 years. She finds working with adults to be a “fruitful” experience: “articulate, enthusiastic, and self-motivated, they tend to take on board information more easily and quickly than children, and are generally more likely to go home and work on topics covered in the lesson” (Stephen 2018, 50). After hearing many monotone interpretations of folk songs, teachers may find that working with adults can be a refreshing change of pace, for “adults may be rusty at imitation, but they are excellent at abstract ideas” (Wreede 2000, 41). In my experience, adults have a much better grasp of why phrasing, dynamics, and articulations are important in the early stages of their playing. Adults are motivated to incorporate bowing principles to produce dynamics early in

their learning because they value musicianship. Myers, Bowles, and Dabback state that contrary to popular belief,

“The limited research on adult and older adult learners in music suggests that there is no identifiable decline in music-learning ability or achievement throughout adulthood. To the contrary, adults who are given appropriate support and strategies are more likely to be successful music learners and participants, and they may provide excellent role models for younger music learners” (Myers et al. 2013, 138).

Life Experience

The greatest benefit that adults bring to private lessons is their life experience. While they may be learning a musical instrument for the first time, “Adults have a lifetime of musical experience, whatever their levels of [musical] expertise, and they have experienced prior learning, either through structured experiences or through exposure and reflection” (Myers et al. 2013, 138). As a result, “adults tend to be more aware of their own learning styles, better able to articulate their learning goals and needs, and generally more self-directed in terms of how to approach learning” (Myers et al. 2013, 138). The majority of my students have entered lessons with the belief that it is easier to learn an instrument as a child. However, adults have the advantage of life experience that they are able to incorporate into learning an instrument. Myers, Bowles, and Dabback reference Labouvie-Vief’s 1985 article in the *Handbook of the psychology of aging* which states that “from a cognitive perspective, it is apparent that adults may carry increasing ability to incorporate knowledge from various spheres in solving problems and to tolerate greater ambiguity in problem-solving tasks in comparison to young learners” (Myers et al. 2013, 137). Adults have experienced music their entire lives, regardless of their formal musical training. Many adults enjoy listening to music and attending concerts. Parents have invested in and observed lessons for their children and seen the value of their children’s lessons. Before beginning lessons, they have thought about music and have decided that it holds

importance in their life. When we consider their life experiences, “music learning may be a matter of applying labels to what adults already know so that they can express their ideas, discover their current capacities, and expand their knowledge and skill” (Myers et al. 2013, 140). For example, from listening to a wide variety of music, Dan understood the concept of a musical phrase. Using his limited knowledge of music, he referred to these phrases as “stanzas”. From watching violinists on YouTube, computer programmer Ben knew that his bow changes, which he called “transitions,” could be more connected. As teachers, we are able to provide the technical knowledge to help adult students produce the sounds they envision and aspire to.

Strengthening Instructional Skills

Teaching both adults and children will strengthen the instructor’s teaching. “Knowledge of adult learning strategies aid in teaching children, and comprehensive pedagogical skills can enhance adult musical learning. For example, adults learning something new often need step-by-step instruction provided by an expert, and young children will often benefit from relevance” (Edgar et al. 2015, 370). Adult learners do have specific learning characteristics. Myers, Bowles, and Dabback identify five traits that are associated with adult learners across studies and should be taken into account when planning instruction: “self-defined needs, goals, and motivations; problem-solving applications; self-direction in learning; cognitive and physical changes; and life experience, background, and self-worth” (Myers et al. 2013, 138).

Teacher as Facilitator

Working with adults necessitates that teachers adjust their role from teacher to facilitator. Functioning as a facilitator allows the teacher to aid the student in reaching their self-defined goals, allows the student self-direction in learning, and acknowledges the student’s background and life experiences while nurturing their self-worth. In American music education,

“Professional models of music participation prevail in schools and community groups, where hierarchical structures and an emphasis on public performance mirror those found in professional bands, choirs, and orchestras. Professionals and the amateurs who emulate them view music as work, whereas others may profess a similar work ethic and level of appreciation for music yet wish for looser structures and little to no emphasis on performance” (Myers et al. 2013, 142-143).

Private lessons offer the perfect outlet for these music participants that Myers, Bowles, and Dabback refer to as “hobbyists.” Many adult students want to learn how to play the violin, but they have little desire to perform, or hold great fear of performing! During the COVID pandemic, I offered a new adult student who lived in my neighborhood the option to have lessons online via Zoom or outdoors, masked and distanced in my yard. His preference was in-person lessons, yet this student was extremely opposed to the outdoor lesson, simply out of fear of one of the neighbors hearing him. As private lesson instructors, we can tailor our approach to the individual needs of the student so that their experience is fulfilling. “Some people may only require opportunity, space, and resources; formal instruction may not suit their preferences or modes of music learning. Informal approaches, where the instructor serves more as a guide or coach, may be appealing to those pursuing music interests as hobbyists” (Myers et al. 2013, 143).

Adults may be learning an instrument for the very first time, but they have been learning all of their lives. “Given their life experience, adult learners are usually more independent than youth— their instruction must reflect this need for self-direction. Teachers of adults must assume the role of mentor and guide instead of imparter of knowledge” (Edgar et al. 2015, 386). Even without having played an instrument before, adults’ prior knowledge and experience with learning “will likely facilitate a much faster learning curve” (Edgar et al. 2015, 386). Typical motivation strategies when working with children can include studio recitals, practice challenges, or “passing” books or songs. When working with adults, it is more important that the teacher

help the learner “‘plan, carry out and evaluate their own learning’ than to dictate specific learning objectives that the teacher designs” (Edgar et al. 2015, 386). This mode of learning is likely different from instructors’ own experiences with learning their instrument. Myers, Bowles, and Dabback acknowledge this difficulty to teachers:

“To serve in flexible roles requires conscious effort and practice. Music teacher candidates usually experience socialization processes throughout their educations that create a perception of normalcy regarding music participation. Their familiarity with hierarchical systems, both in their own activities and in their observations of peer experiences, do not often challenge assumptions of music participation and the authoritarian place of teachers” (Myers et al. 2013, 144).

Rather than traditional hierarchical structures, private lessons can “be viewed as a team-approach to reaching progress and goals versus a teacher-learner method. The teacher must shift gears from ‘disseminator’ to ‘facilitator’” (Edgar et al. 2015, 382). Adult students often make this switch easy with their self-awareness and observational skills. Adults are communicative, and “While receptive to expert instruction, an adult will be inclined to interject self-assessment” (Edgar et al. 2015, 382) and questions. It is important for the teacher to listen carefully to these questions and assessments, translate the student’s colloquial language to musical verbiage, and guide the student to understanding and progress. The teacher must help the adult be able to teach themselves, and “A goal of adult music learning should be to foster self-direction and empowerment to engage actively in music, to think in new ways by reflecting critically about music, and to develop self-confidence and competence, leading to greater independence in future learning” (Myers et al. 2013, 139). Research indicates that “Self-directed learning is the most commonly cited characteristic of adult learners in the literature and should be recognized as the actual motivation for participation in many cases” (Myers et al. 2013, 139). In addition to teaching fundamentals, it is important to guide adult learners with practice strategies and tools. As Edgar and Hartley state, “This self-efficacy is necessary for the adults to be successful

musically and satisfied emotionally” (Edgar et al. 2015, 386). Their respect for the teacher’s expert opinion notwithstanding, “Adult music learners must perceive a measure of autonomy in their musical activities. Instructors can provide structure but should avoid coercion or controlling approaches. Participants must feel that they have choice and input into their own contributions and learning within the parameters set by the program” (Myers et al. 2013, 141).

Studio Strategies

Prepare the Learner: Defining Goals and Expectations

It is imperative that the adult student and the teacher be on the same page about their goals and expectations. After having negative experiences with working with adults, Deryn Cullen suggests developing a screening process before agreeing to take on an adult student. His questionnaire includes: “Does he have an instrument yet? Is it rented or his own? What work, study, and/or family commitments does he have? How long has this person wanted to take lessons and why? If you teach from home, how far away from you does the prospective student live?” (Cullen 2009, 34) Regardless of whether these factors may be indicative of a student’s eventual level of dedication and commitment, my personal philosophy is to give each student a chance. I suggest that each teacher develop their own questionnaire or interview for their adult students’ initial lesson. In addition to informing the teacher’s lesson planning, taking the time to chat and get to know each other at the beginning of the first lesson can help put the student at ease. Why does the student want to play the violin? What are their goals? The student may wish to eventually be able to play with friends, or they may dream of playing a specific piece. Does the student have any physical disabilities, especially in the hands or upper body? Mary Schallert points out that “pain is such a good excuse not to practice” (Schallert 2010, 35). As a teacher,

physical adaptations may be necessary. For example, the bow hold may be adapted to accommodate arthritis in the right hand.

It can be helpful to demonstrate the student's trajectory early in their lessons. After the first lesson, I send students a playlist of repertoire that they can expect to learn over the course of the next year. Instead of giving a student sheet music, which may tempt the student to get ahead, using a playlist can allow a student to see and hear what they can accomplish in a short period of time if they stick with the program. Some students have a "dream piece" in mind, but most of my students came to the violin because they loved its sound, and their only goals were to learn how to play "beautiful" music. Like Mary Schallert, I view myself "akin to the local ski instructor: my job is to help the student get safely down the hill and learn to enjoy the sport as a life skill" (Schallert 2010, 35).

One of the common complaints among studio teachers is that adults "never practice" (Schallert 2010, 34). Though adults lack "the benefit of a nagging mother telling them to practice every day" (Schallert 2010, 34), motivation is often not to blame. Adults are highly motivated. They have taken the time, money, and initiative to purchase an instrument and supplies, find a private teacher, and schedule private lessons without a parent to prod them along. While the student has allotted time for weekly lessons, they may have overlooked the time needed to practice. Schallert advises equating learning an instrument to taking up an exercise program: "You will not get stronger, lose weight or get into better shape at all if you only exercise once a week. It is a start, but you must make time in your schedule" (Schallert 2010, 34). Teachers may have to adjust their goals and expectations for adult students. The overarching goal is for the student to incorporate music into their long-term daily life while making gradual progress. For the teacher, the goal is retention. Due to adults' busy schedules, and "Because adults have

individualized goals in mind, sometimes a challenge exists in aligning the goals of the student with the time allotted for fulfilling the goals” (Myers et al. 2013, 138). The teacher must establish small, attainable goals within a realistic timeframe. The teacher should communicate with their student and make it clear how these small goals are building towards the student’s overall goals each week. Adults have not come to the violin looking for another responsibility or obligation, or one more extracurricular activity to add to their college application. They have come to lessons out of a love for music and are seeking enjoyment. Schallert advises telling students: “You cannot look at your violin as some grumpy parent reminding you of yet one more obligation before you sleep. You need to think of your violin as a friend that brings you joy; you must want to pick it up on a daily basis” (Schallert 2010, 34). Schallert tries to arrive at this realization as quickly as possible because, “unlike a child, a frustrated adult has no real reason to keep going with the violin if it is driving him crazy. Once my adult students find a love for the violin, they are hooked” (Schallert 2010, 34). I have found that introducing small and attainable tone production and musical concepts early, perhaps earlier than they would be introduced to a child, can help adults find this love for the violin.

Establish a Climate Conducive to Learning: Setting Boundaries

Students and teachers alike may enjoy the social benefits of weekly private lessons, but it is important to set clear boundaries and expectations. Schallert worked in the mental health world for more than 12 years. She writes that “In the mental health world, you must learn to set boundaries. It is essential for the healing of the patient to not cross the line and become friends; they need you to be professional . . . In the music world, however, these rules are more akin to useful guidelines” (Schallert 2010, 35). Out of necessity, private lessons may be at the bottom of students’ priority list. Cynthia Heidel, director of the McAuley Center Intergenerational String

Orchestra in Hot Springs, Arkansas, notes: “Motivation is not an issue for adult students, but regular attendance can be a factor. Family obligations— elderly parents, sick grandchildren, illness or death of friends and family, and physical afflictions— may interfere with home practice as well as attendance at rehearsals and lessons” (Wendell 1999, 62). Establish a clear cancellation policy in writing. I have my students sign a student contract at the beginning of each “semester”: Fall, Spring, and Summer. Adults have more demands on their time and more responsibilities to uphold. Be empathetic, but have a clear idea of how flexible you want to be with re-scheduling and stick to it. With proper notice, you may have specific time slots set aside for weekly make-up lessons. The teacher must not be **too** flexible. In Devyn Cullen’s experience, “Eager to accommodate my students’ aspirations to learn and progress, I tried offering ad hoc lessons to my busiest students, being flexible with lesson times and working around their schedule instead of the other way around. It never worked. The reason: one of the keys to successful learning in music is consistency” (Cullen 2009, 33). Teachers are not able to give their best when they are not caring for themselves, and Cullen found that “this inconsistency played havoc with my own schedule so I had to get firm: the adult student either needed to make time for lessons and practice or accept that he had bitten off more than he could chew and should call it a day” (Cullen 2009, 34). Structure and consistency are key in making music a lifelong habit.

Design a Pattern of Learning Experiences: Establishing a Routine

It is important to establish expectations for the typical lesson routine. Does the student attend lessons weekly, biweekly, or monthly? How is the lesson structured? Because students enjoy the social aspect of lessons, the teacher may need to limit social time or chatting to the beginning and end of the lesson. Be understanding of the student’s needs, but respect your time.

Schallert advises, “Make them pay for the time. Stick to the time you have given them, do not become their sounding board for their life troubles. You are not qualified to do this and it will drain your emotional reserves which you need to be a good teacher” (Schallert 2010, 35). In my teaching, I try to limit chatting to the first ten minutes for adults and the first five minutes or less for children. Adult students may try to distract the teacher from the playing portion of the lesson with talking because they are afraid that their practice was insufficient or they want to prove their competence. Teachers may need to “Learn to interrupt nervous talking. The student will be frustrated if you let them talk the whole lesson . . . Don’t let them distract you with too many questions. They just want you to know they are smart and capable because being a beginner at something makes them feel vulnerable” (Schallert 2010, 35). In my experience, once the student is warmed up and playing, they are glad to be focusing on learning the violin rather than chatting about their life. I look forward to seeing my students each week, and as adults, you can decide to be friends. Schallert advises that “Once you know them well, and have established clear lines of the lesson routine and what you do with it, you can become friends if you like. Always hold their paid lesson time as a sacred time of learning this beautiful instrument[,] the violin” (Schallert 2010, 35).

Lesson schedules for children and adults may look a little different. Katrina Wreede advises that teachers should “Schedule lessons regularly enough to make progress while allowing time to prepare adequately. The goal is to help the students incorporate music into their lives permanently, to view themselves as artistic people” (Wreede 2000, 41). While most teachers prefer weekly lessons for practical reasons, I have found that biweekly lessons work best for many of my adult students. Students will often cancel or quit because they feel that they are not

adequately prepared and are wasting your time. Wreede outlines a situation that I encountered early in my work with adult students:

“Many string teachers have had eager adult beginners arrive for their first lessons, ready to suffer being ignorant for the sake of an artistic outlet. For a while, they are all enthusiasm and curiosity, calling with questions, playing nursery rhymes with a passion. A few months later, they call to cancel a lesson because they haven’t practiced enough to justify your time. Progress slows, and eventually they decide that adults can’t learn a string instrument, so they quit. In spite of good will on all sides, the adult beginners and the teacher feel like failures” (Wreede 2000, 41).

Decreasing the frequency of lessons from weekly to biweekly, even temporarily, may help ease student frustration and increase retention. If students have detailed lesson notes for their home practice sessions, they feel confident that they can make suitable progress within two weeks. Though their violin playing improves the quickest with the weekly guidance of a teacher, who can prevent bad habits from creeping in over the span of two weeks, it is important to protect the ego of the adult learner. Adults want to be good students, and they want to come to their lessons prepared. They hold themselves and their preparation to a high standard. Shame is a powerful emotion, and many adults are not happy to have a teacher repeat themselves each week or walk them through a guided practice session.

Creating Community in the Studio

One reason that adult students are motivated to seek music instruction is a desire for social interaction. However, adults are often self-conscious, and they may not feel ready to play in front of other people in a fiddle group or community orchestra setting early in their violin playing. Students may settle for one-on-one social interaction through weekly private lessons until they decide that they are ready to play in front of others. Myers, Bowles, and Dabback recognize that community groups usually consist of members with some musical background, and that

“Examples of entry points for adult novice musicians are less common. Increasing numbers of communities offer such programs as the Late-Starters’ Orchestra in London, England and New Horizons bands, choirs, and orchestras (which feature instruction for beginners) in the United States and Canada. But evidence suggests that most members of these programs are returning to participation rather than beginning for the first time” (Myers et al. 2013, 142).

Cello teacher Nick Cootes of the East London Late Starters' Orchestra (ELLSO) states that “Even in the first week we’ll try to get them into an ensemble, even if they are just playing open strings” (Homfray 2008, 31). ELLSO beginners take part in group lessons, technique and musicianship classes, and ensemble playing. This approach works for many adults, but some self-conscious adults are more comfortable with one-on-one coaching from someone they trust, and are not ready to expose others to their playing. Additionally, many orchestras for adult beginners are aimed towards seniors and retirees and meet during the day. Intergenerational Orchestras, like Cynthia Heidel’s McAuley Center Intergenerational String Orchestra in Hot Springs, Arkansas, combine the very young and the very old: “As with most intergenerational groups, the orchestra skips a generation, bringing mainly children and youth together with senior citizens” (Wendell 1999, 56). The Omaha Intergenerational Orchestra requires that all musicians be under 22 or over 55 (Wendell 1999, 57). As a studio teacher, I desire to promote inclusivity and advocate that anyone can learn an instrument. Harp instructor Michele Pinet notes, “One thing sorely lacking in individual lessons is a sense of community and esprit de corps” (Pinet 2019, 29). This does not have to be the case: private teachers can create a sense of community by getting creative with their studio. Doing so will provide opportunities for social interaction, maintain student motivation, and increase retention. Private instructors can attempt to find a middle ground by incorporating occasional optional group classes for adults ages 18 and up.

Group Classes

Group class has long been recognized for its social and ensemble playing benefits by Suzuki method teachers. For adults, one challenge can be finding the time to attend a weekly lesson, group class, and practice. Studio teachers may poll students for their availability and establish a biweekly or monthly group class. “For the adult learner, trying something new can be intimidating, mainly because, as adults, we can be self-conscious about making mistakes. But in a *group* of adult beginners, learning through making these mistakes becomes less intimidating and can be fun” (Edgar et al. 2015, 375). Because adults are self-guided and experienced learners, they can share stories about their struggles and exchange successful strategies. Cynthia Heidel believes that teachers should “Encourage learners to share their analogies. While young beginners may be shy about admitting their weaknesses, seniors are usually quick to share some of the challenges they have found in a particular passage or technique, and ask for help or offer each other assistance during their warm up time” (Heidel 1999, 59). Students can also poke fun at their teacher together. My students like to tease me about how the “left elbow being around” is always the answer, or how “one more time” is always a lie. Attending group classes can remind adult students that there are other adults taking this same journey and facing similar struggles. Schallert notes that “adults do a great job at supporting each other. They become friends and sometimes even get together to play” (Schallert 2010, 35). Not feeling alone can keep students going, and

“. . . group learning can enhance the experience for the adult learner. Beginners will become frustrated more quickly than children because adults are accustomed to doing many things well. Learning in a group will help fulfill the social and emotional connections needed to move past the feelings of frustration. Everyone making mistakes together, celebrating individual and group progress, and accomplishing goals they never thought possible, are essential components when designing the adult music learning experience” (Edgar et al. 2015, 376).

Group classes can be organized in a number of ways. Depending on the demographics of the studio, the class could be for adults only or take an intergenerational approach. A benefit of the intergenerational experience is the opportunity to witness lifelong learning in action, demonstrating that music “can be appreciated throughout a lifetime, and can be enjoyed by multiple generations” (Edgar et. al 2015, 388). Each class can have a different purpose. A class could focus on a technical skill, rehearse an ensemble piece with different parts for different ability levels, provide a chance to perform repertoire in front of peers in an informal setting, or function as a watch party or a book club. Pinet suggests that students can “. . . act as a group to work on rhythm drills, flashcards, history, and facts about composers . . .” (Pinet 2019, 30). Pinet hosts studio listening parties, where students listen to virtuoso performers play the standard repertoire. Students “discussed performances, tempi, and dynamics. This event provided the results of group concert attendance without the accompanying logistic complications” (Pinet 2019, 30). There are performances from many great violinists to choose from online, but students may not know where to start. Introducing students to the superstars of the classical world can help them feel in the know. Group activities “balance solitary practice, build camaraderie and heartfelt friendships, and give students and their families fun positive associations with music, their instruments, and their teachers” (Pinet 2019, 29). Of course, breaks that provide refreshments and chances to socialize are much appreciated.

Mary Schallert believes that teaching students in a group from the beginning is crucial. She finds that “If you teach your adult student in a group from the beginning, they will get used to playing music with others and see it as an advantage. If you let the adult student wait until they personally think they are good enough, you will never get them to play with anyone and they will eventually quit unless they have some kind of personal chutzpah to keep going”

(Schallert 2010, 35). Pinet notes that group classes can provide peer pressure in a good way:

“Students rise to the occasion in front of their peers and families.” (Pinet 2019, 29). I believe that organizing occasional group classes will provide opportunities for socialization and motivation while balancing adult students’ shyness, sensitivity, and busy schedules.

Studio Culture

Adults wish to identify as musical people and to feel part of a musical community.

Children have competitions, youth orchestras, and summer camps. Emily Wright notes that “It’s easy to be enthusiastic and motivated when you grow up around a group of people who like the things you like” (Wright 2007, 90). Encourage students to listen to music of all kinds. Share with them some of your favorite pieces and what you are currently listening to. Wright suggests getting students interested in

“the lore of the musician: it can be as simple as watching big-budget releases like ‘Amadeus’ and ‘Immortal Beloved’ to Christopher Nupen’s stirring Jacqueline du Pré/Elgar biopic or reading the sad story of Mahler’s sudden demise. Have them sit in the audience at college-level master classes or professional orchestra rehearsals. When they are ready, an amateur ensemble can be a fabulous context into which they can pour all of their musical efforts. It’s so important that their experience not be in a vacuum” (Wright 2007, 91).

In their pursuit of becoming a musician, adults appreciate a comprehensive approach. Not only do adult learners

“want to focus on improving their musical skills, but they also enjoy expanding their musical knowledge. Adults appreciate information about the composer and the music they are performing, and frequently will add their own life experiences to these discussions. Incorporating opportunities to glean factual knowledge not only enhances the progress of the participants, but can also heighten their experiences in the adult learning environment” (Edgar et al. 2015, 384-385).

My students have excitedly relayed juicy gossip about the love triangle between Brahms and the Schumanns like an undergraduate in Music History class. We communicate about recordings and videos we have enjoyed online and or live concerts that we have seen. My

students also enjoy hearing about my musical life and the experience of studying music in school.

In addition to group meetings, electronic communication can help to build a studio community. Pinet suggests a studio newsletter, which she has found helpful to maintain an open line of communication with families and cultivate student interest. Her studio newsletters contain “student progress and achievements, lists of music listening opportunities and the encouragement for attendance, and mention of studio-wide events” (Pinet 2019, 30). The newsletter can be a tool to list social events, concerts, links to playlists and videos, and reading suggestions. Students came to the violin because they want to have fun, and they enjoy feeling part of the musician club.

Physical-Related Learning Challenges

Some teachers are hesitant to take on adult students because of physical limitations. Whatever physical limitations adult and senior students may have can be accommodated with slight physical modifications. Adults may not have textbook posture, but the goal is for them to be able to play the instrument efficiently and comfortably for life. I find that adults’ tension issues are usually due to a combination of their strength and a sense of anxiety or excess effort. In lessons, I seek opportunities to encourage students to relax and lighten their grip in both the left and right hands. Early on, I demonstrate that the left hand does not have to press the string all the way down to the fingerboard in order to create a pitch. When teaching bow skills, I discuss the physics of the violin and that sound is created by vibrating the string from side to side, and how exerting too much weight or pressure into the string prevents these vibrations. I also demonstrate the difference in tone quality between a resonant, pulled sound and a forced, “pressed” sound. Adult students often create a pressed sound when trying to play loudly, but are

quick to agree that the lighter sound is more resonant and pleasing to the ear. The most common issue that I see is “shaky bow” caused by an uneven bow speed. Usually, this is caused by the student beginning notes hesitantly, with too slow of a bow speed. Despite physical concerns,

“Physical and sensorimotor declines associated with aging are typically compensated for with cognitive maturity, socialization, prior experience, self-knowledge, and understanding of personal learning style. In terms of cognition, many researchers now consider adulthood to be a period of continuing development rather than a time of maintenance or inevitable decline and deficit” (Myers et al. 2013, 139).

Adults are realistic and understand limitations, often to the point of being too self-deprecating. Myers, Bowles, and Dabback note that “People who engage or re-engage in music activities in maturity do so with a developed cognition that understands and accepts limitation, with the patience and will to persist in the face of difficulty” (Myers et al. 2013, 139).

Cognitive and Emotional Challenges

Many of the difficulties of teaching adults pertain to mental hurdles. Ros Stephen acknowledges that teaching adults can be “more complex than teaching children. Children generally have lower expectations, are less set in their ways, and (hopefully) don’t yet carry the baggage of ingrained insecurities, echoes of negative voices or regrets of missed opportunities” (Stephen 2018, 50). We should acknowledge that being an adult student requires bravery. Stephen notes, “As an adult, voluntarily becoming a complete beginner on a technically challenging instrument, and investing time and money in lessons, requires a lot of courage. A new student may have spent years thinking about starting the violin before finally taking the plunge” (Stephen 2018, 50). After taking the plunge, students are eager to please their teacher and display competence. Several of my students have reported fearing wasting my time and theirs. Cellist George Kennaway, founder of the amateur orchestra Yorkshire Late Starters’ Strings in Leeds, states that “Adults are normally very anxious to do well, and don’t like making

mistakes. Often in the first lesson you have to create an atmosphere in which it is OK to get something wrong” (Homfray 2008, 30). In my private teaching, I attempt to cultivate a laboratory setting. I emphasize that the lesson is the perfect time to make a mistake, because it allows me to be present to help the student. Additionally, I incorporate the mindfulness principle of non-judgement, encouraging students to observe what is happening objectively without emotional reactivity when possible.

Generally, it is not fun to be “bad” at something. Adult students who are interested in taking private lessons are often highly trained professionals with successful careers and have not been true beginners at something in a long time. “Chances are they are good at a number of things in life, and are quick to pick up new skills as they become necessary. The learning curve is gentle for them, so when they see the seemingly insurmountable effort required to be even mediocre on a stringed instrument, it is an uncomfortable and frustrating experience” (Wright 2007, 90). Teachers must be sensitive guides, for “Adults need even more compassion as new learners because they have reached a point in their lives where they generally stick to doing things they are good at and do not often try things where failure is a very real option” (Schallert 2010, 34). Emily Wright finds that “addressing the adult student as a person is the key to rapid success” (Wright 2007, 90). While it is important to be empathetic and sensitive, do not allow the students’ insecurities to derail the lesson. Stephen advises, “I try to steer people away from excuses and rationalisations and try (with varying degrees of success) to get them to focus on effective practice, and slow and steady work on technique and musicianship” (Stephen 2018, 50). Teachers can help dissuade some of adults’ anxiety and eagerness to please by taking on the facilitator role. Cynthia Heidel recommends that teachers “Be a resource and a facilitator.

Although many will view you as the expert, let them know that you, too, are learning by working with them, that you continue to read and study about music and teaching” (Heidel 1999, 59).

Increased self-awareness and observational skills can benefit adults’ learning, but also contribute to self-consciousness and insecurity. Laura Sinnerton, a viola instructor with the East London Late Starters’ Orchestra, notes that “Children have no inhibitions, but adults are afraid that they will sound bad and make fools of themselves. I have to impress on them that a lesson is the time to make mistakes” (Homfray 2008, 32). I reiterate to my students that they are paying me to help them. If they came to their lesson playing everything perfectly, they would have no need for me! In fact, learning does not occur unless mistakes are being made. What motivates the brain to commit an experience by memory is error correction: resolving a discrepancy between the learner’s intentions and the actual outcome through changed behavior (Duke 2012, 38). Adults become frustrated more easily, and can be “susceptible to fits of anxiety or depression in relation to their progress” (Wright 2007, 90). Due to their life experience, adults recognize the sound of great violin playing. They are also hyper-aware of the sound of bad violin playing. “Adults also have the ability to know what they want to sound like which gives them a lower mistake/frustration threshold than children” (Schallert 2010, 34).

Anxiety and desire to please can have physical manifestations. “With anxiety can come tension, which in most adults may manifest itself as one of a whole suite of physical problems, from a general stiffness of joints to arthritis” (Homfray 2008, 33). I find that my adults are often tense as a result of trying to maintain control of the instrument. George Kennaway comments that “Even more advanced players can be wary of something that might go wrong, like an upward shift. Adults try to creep up on the note from behind and startle it before it runs away.

They don't have the freedom to just make one movement. They are constantly trying to control everything, whereas children just go for it" (Homfray 2008, 33).

Katrina Wreede offers the practical advice to help adults "Get the best instrument possible. Young students may not notice squeaks and squawks right away, but an adult will" (Wreede 2000, 41). I have found it very important to guide the student through the instrument rental or purchasing process. There are many "Violin Shaped Objects" on the market that can increase student frustration: instruments that look the part, but exhibit a frustrating lack of playability and inadequate tone production. If a student comes to a lesson with an instrument outfit that they purchased from Amazon or a similar outlet, I encourage them to consider upgrading fairly early in our relationship. Students can also be overwhelmed by the amount of information available on the Internet and intimidated by violin snobs. Your student will be grateful to have your guidance and suggestions when purchasing or renting a new instrument.

Accommodating Learning Styles

Occasionally, a student's frustration may cause them to lash out. They are protective of their need to display competence, are experienced in teaching themselves, and aware of their learning style. "The intense desire with which most adults approach learning can create insecurity among students, both old and young. Don't be surprised if you are corrected at times; accept it graciously" (Heidel 1999, 59). Adults give more feedback on teaching methods than children. As Nick Cootes, cello instructor with the East London Late Starters' Symphony Orchestra, points out, "They tell you what they think and feel. They have developed their own learning style, so they know what works for them and what doesn't" (Homfray 2008, 32). Instructors must acknowledge and respect adult students' prior knowledge and experience. "The adult musician may be a beginner at playing an instrument or reading music, but they are not a

beginner in life. Adult music educators must treat their adult students with the respect and dignity they deserve” (Edgar et al. 2015, 386). When teaching adult beginners, it is crucial to not take a one size fits all approach. Adult learners have figured out strategies that suit them. When taking music lessons, “Adult students learn how they have their entire lives, and learn based on how they have engaged in education in other contexts” (Edgar et al. 2015, 386). Ros Stephen has found that adults generally fit into two categories when they are learning the violin:

“The more intuitive and ‘right-brained’ type, or the more logical and analytical ‘left-brained type.’ The latter tend to enjoy working on finer details of technique, and are often good at reading music, but they may need more encouragement when it comes to listening, playing freely and musically, or learning by ear. The former may turn up to their first lesson having already worked out some tunes on their own, but without having stopped to think about technique. The challenge is, of course, to try to encourage and develop a student’s strengths while also focusing on and improving their weaknesses” (Stephen 2008, 51).

Cootes finds that “Some learn best from you telling them things and demonstrating. Others pick things up in a more intuitive way. With one pupil I just played duets. I felt like I wasn’t teaching him at all, but I was” (Homfray 2008, 33).

Repertoire Progression

The selection of repertoire can be one of the greatest challenges facing the studio teacher. Many existing progressions, including the Mimi Zweig and Suzuki progressions, are geared towards beginners who start as children. Method books developed specifically for adults are limited. While the aural approach has proven extremely effective with children, “most adult beginners are genuinely interested in learning to read music immediately, and therefore may be frustrated with a Suzuki or Music Learning Theory approach that stresses aural skills first” (Edgar et al. 2015, 375). The ability to read music is important for adults to be independent learners and to someday be able to purchase sheet music and learn tunes without the aid of their teacher. When they begin taking lessons, some students may have a goal piece in mind. In my

studio, the most popular request by far has been Massenet's *Meditation from Thaïs*. However, in my experience, more commonly the adult student is not versed in classical music. They enjoy the sound of the instrument and want to play "beautiful music". When selecting repertoire, teachers must "present challenges to participants or else risk boring them. Conversely, challenges that are too great will result in frustration" (Myers et al. 2013, 139). The appendix features a suggested technique and repertoire progression that has proven successful in my studio. My progression is primarily drawn from three sources: Michael Allen, Robert Gillespie, and Pamela Tellejohn Hayes's *Essential Elements for Strings Violin Book One*, Barbara Barber's *Solos for Young Violinists Volume 1*, and Jessica O'Leary's *Best of Grade 1 Repertoire*, with additional pieces from Suzuki Books 1 and 2. Repertoire is selected from multiple materials in order to give adults the opportunity to play music in a variety of styles and moods. More importantly, the primary goal of the repertoire selection was to introduce one or two new concepts or skills into a piece of music during each unit. As I conducted my research, I found that by working through a single volume of repertoire from a particular author, students often have to incorporate multiple skills into each new piece. In contrast, my progression is designed to allow students to hone one skill in both their *Essential Elements* and repertoire during each unit. I have found that adult students appreciate mastering one skill in their technique and repertoire during any given assignment. Given their limited practice time, they usually prefer to "perfect" a skill to the best of their ability rather than struggling with multiple skills and concepts between lessons. Additionally, various method books remain at one level of difficulty for too long or increase difficulty too quickly from piece to piece. By selecting repertoire from a variety of sources, teachers can handcraft a progression suited to the learner's needs, goals, and pace of learning. My progression is based primarily in folk songs, baroque, and classical repertoire because my students expressed an

admiration for and a desire to play “classical” music. Teachers may incorporate improvisation, pop, folk, fiddle, or jazz tunes to suit their students’ interests and expressed goals. The inclusion of the appendix is intended to aid the studio teacher by providing a flexible framework for repertoire selection and skill building that can be tailored to the individual learner.

The progression pairs vocabulary and skills from *Essential Elements* with longer pieces.

This method is in keeping with Edgar’s advice:

“Utilizing standard method books for beginning instrumental instruction can be just as successful for adults, even though these publications were primarily developed for school-aged children. It is recommended to supplement these standard method books with beginning-level appropriate familiar selections that interest the particular age group of learners” (Edgar et al. 2015, 376).

By pairing skills with repertoire right away, we can help students understand *why* we do things the way we do and *why* these skills are useful to learn. During the *Essential Elements* portion of the lesson, “Describe precisely what technique is, why it is done that way, and what the payoff is” (Wreede 2000, 41). Myers, Bowles, and Dabback suggest using an “investigation-action-reflection cycle,” and that “There should also be immediate real-life application at some level toward the self-defined goal; busy adults need to know that they are making obvious progress on an incremental basis” (Myers et al. 2013, 139). Among my adult students, there were multiple requests for “long songs”: students were not satisfied with pieces that were two or three lines in length, and felt that the real challenge came from “transitions” between phrases. I wanted to incorporate music from a variety of styles that offered musical challenges. When working with adults, I emphasize musical concepts and have higher expectations for dynamics and articulations. Once adults lock in to this aspect of violin playing, their practice is much more challenging and rewarding. When focusing on musical concepts, “Even relatively simple pieces offer opportunities for challenge. Musicians at all levels strive to perfect tone, articulation,

dynamic contrast, phrasing, and all the other characteristics that musicality comprises. A successful adult music director understands that challenge often lies in the minutiae of the parts rather than in overt compositional complexity” (Myers et al. 2013, 141).

Pace of Learning

Adults have different expectations from their repertoire, playing, and pace of learning. For example, “Adults start out with a more sophisticated palette of musical styles and tones. A few weeks of ‘Twinkle’ are fine, but if it continues too long, it is a sure path to disenchantment. On the other hand, fantastic but difficult repertoire may be just as defeating” (Wreede 2000, 41). The progression is laid out in “Units” rather than weeks or months, allowing the student to set the pace without feeling that they are getting ahead or falling behind. The teacher may have to leave a piece before it is polished and return to it later as review if the student is becoming frustrated or bored. We must remember that the goal is for the student to enjoy playing their instrument and to incorporate music making into their routine, rather than perfection. Magdalena Garblinska, a violin teacher with the New York Late Starters’ String Orchestra, finds that “I have to vary the pieces we do a lot. Sometimes I would like to stay with one for longer but I can see they are getting restless” (Homfray 2008, 31). The progression should, of course, be tailored and adjusted to the student’s individual needs, goals, and interests, but can provide a helpful framework for the studio teacher.

Conclusion

Pursuing private lesson instruction as an adult is an act of courage. The ultimate goal of equitable music education is lifelong learning and enjoyment of music for all, regardless of race, gender, opportunity, or age. Playing a musical instrument provides innumerable benefits to students of all populations. But learning to play an instrument for the first time is never easy,

especially when managing a full plate of responsibilities. As studio teachers, we must support our adult students in reaching their individual goals in any way we can. This requires us to be flexible in our approach and re-examine our role as educators. Understanding concepts of andragogy can help instructors serve both adults and children to the best of our abilities. While working with adults presents many challenges, there is no reason that adult students cannot be just as successful as our younger beginning students. As the fabric of society changes, it is time for us to examine how to serve all populations with our music instruction, thus contributing to lifelong learning and the learning society.

Appendix: Suggested Technique and Repertoire Progression

Unit 1: Setting up the Left Hand

- Plucking Open Strings
 - Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings* Violin Book 1, pp. 4-5
- Plucking D String Notes
 - Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 6-9 and p. 13 #36
- Plucking A String Notes
 - Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 10-12 (skip #35)
- Bow Builders on Pencil
 - Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 7-9
- Plucking Longer Tunes
 - Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 14-15

Unit 2: Basic Bowing

- Bow Builders on Bow
 - Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 7-8
- Rosin Raps
 - Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, p. 13 #37-39: on rosin and on open strings
- Bowing Open Strings
 - Rocking Arm Levels exercise
 - Arm levels and bowing open strings
- Reading Music and Bowing Open Strings
 - Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 16-18
- Bowing Fingered Notes
 - Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 18-19

Unit 3: Eighth Notes

- Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 20-21
- One Octave D Major Scale
- Barber, *Solos for Young Violinists*, Vol. 1, “English Folk Song: The Old Woman and the Peddler”

Unit 4: Half Notes and 4th Finger

- Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 22-23
- Review as needed: Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 24-25

Unit 5: Dotted Half Notes and 3/4 Time, Slurs

- Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 28-29 and p. 30
- O’Leary, *Best of Grade 1 Violin*, “Fanfare”

Unit 6: G String Notes

- Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 26-27 and p. 31
- One Octave G Major Scale
- O’Leary, *Best of Grade 1 Violin*, “Grey Dove”

Unit 7: Low 2’s

- Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 32-33
- One Octave C Major Scale
- Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 34-35
- Barber, *Solos for Young Violinists*, “Bohemian Folk Song: November”

Unit 8: E String Notes

- Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, pp. 38-39
- One Octave A Major Scale
- O’Leary, *Best of Grade 1 Violin*, “From Old Vienna”

Unit 9: Whole Notes and Staccato, High 3’s

- Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, p. 37
- Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, p. 40 #167-168
- One Octave E Major Scale
- O’Leary, *Best of Grade 1 Violin*, “Merry Widow Waltz”
- Review Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, p. 40 #169-173 as needed

Unit 10: Hooked Bows and Flats

- Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, p. 41 #174-176
- One Octave F Major Scale
- Suzuki, *Violin School*, Vol. 1, “Minuet No. 3”
- Suzuki, *Violin School*, Vol. 2, “Long Long Ago”
- Suzuki, *Violin School*, Vol. 2, “Musette”
- Review Allen et. al, *Essential Elements for Strings*, p. 41 #177-180 as needed

Unit 11: Sixteenth Notes

- One Octave B-flat Major Scale
- One Octave E-flat Major Scale
- O’Leary, *Best of Grade 1 Violin*, “Elenke”
- Barber, *Solos for Young Violinists*, “Musette”
- Two Octave Scales

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