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David Sogin¹

Forum: String Pedagogy for the 21st Century: Catching up With Research²

Abstract

As string researchers teaching in the 21st Century, we need to better understand what it is we need to teach and how best to teach it. We also need to think about our current string research and determine how it can best be aligned with our current pedagogy, what reinforces the theoretical function of these pedagogic ideas and how they relate to one another. In addition, we also need to recommend the best teaching strategies through systematic analysis and research, which can provide sound and efficient pedagogic alternatives for string teachers.

Keywords

string pedagogy, string research, bow technique, motion, research dissemination

My talk today concerns String Pedagogy for the 21st Century: Catching up With Research. Our colleague Gail Barnes (2010) spoke to this group of string researchers in 2010 about the topic of *who*, or *for whom* do we do research and went on to say, "I am relatively certain that we do get our questions from string students and teachers, but I am not sure the results always get conveyed back to them." Professor Barnes then goes on to address this particular issue in the rest of her article, which can be found in the *String Research Journal Volume II* (2011). My talk does not address *who* investigates or *why* we investigate ideas in string pedagogy, but considers in part the *what* that lies at the heart of our pedagogy. In addition, I explore some possible ideas as to how we might convey back to our students and teachers in the 21st century the results of what we as researchers and string pedagogues have learned.

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² This article is based on the address presented by the author as the recipient of the 2013 *String Research Award* at the ASTA National Conference in Providence, RI.

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David Nelson (1983), violinist and string educator, wrote an article for the *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* titled, String Teaching and Performance: A Review of Research Findings, where he clearly states, "Technical aspects of performance are of primary concern to many string teachers. However, there remains considerable disagreement over the acceptability of certain performance practices and resulting technical considerations" such as vibrato, shifting, and bowing. He goes on to say later in the article that string teaching is traditionally resistant to change, and that many of our contemporary approaches can be traced back to the players and teachers of the 18th and 19th Century. Finally, Nelson concludes his article by saying, "While time has proven the necessity and effectiveness of many of these pedagogical approaches little research has been attempted to develop and test alternatives." This article was published in 1983, exactly 30 years ago, and I am not sure a lot has actually changed.

Marianne Murray Perkins (1995) wrote a masterful text based on her dissertation titled, A Comparison of Violin Playing Techniques: Kato Havas, Paul Rolland and Shinichi Suzuki. Found on page 176, she puts together a two dimensional chart that provides a clear framework of these three well known 20th century pedagogues and their theoretical models of pedagogy for teaching the violin. Along the top she shows the three theorists, Havas, Rolland, and Suzuki, and on the side Perkins articulates a series of common skills that speaks directly to string teaching and specifically to violin playing. The intent of this chart is to provide comparisons of one pedagogue with another. This chart is fairly comprehensive, looking at posture, right hand, and left hand specifics. However I think what is clearly missing in this matrix is the current string research that either reinforces the theoretical function of these pedagogic ideas and how they relate to one another or better yet suggest possible and plausible alternatives for teachers to consider. It would even be possible to use such a matrix to show areas where little or no research has been attempted. A clear example of this is the new and interesting discoveries about the way string players approach vibrato that Geringer, Allen, and MacLeod (2010) introduced in their research. Teachers and students should be made aware of these studies (see also Geringer, MacLeod, & Allen, 2010). Their findings through careful and systematic research do challenge the assumptions that we make as string teachers and equally important, challenge our own prior research such as the early vibrato studies by Papich and Rainbow (1974 & 1975). It is this kind of opportunity that we can take advantage of to make clear connections between string research and string pedagogy. The remainder of this article discusses two studies that I believe challenges how we think about particular claims made by our pedagogy and to further suggest three possibilities for our ASTA research community to help with both collaborative string research, as well as aid in the dissemination of our findings.

While on sabbatical a few years ago, I had the opportunity to talk with many