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5

INTRODUCING STUDENTS TO THE UKULELE

The first day with instruments is exciting for everyone involved and provides opportunities for the teacher to set the tone for future lessons, not unlike the first day of school. To better plan and implement a ukulele program, it is best to introduce the instrument after more general classroom routines and expectations have been firmly established and the teacher has developed some individualized knowledge of students.

ACCOMMODATING (SPECIAL) LEARNERS

Many practices for accommodating special learners also make for good teaching that will maximize the clarity and effectiveness of lessons for all students.

Pre-Teaching and Modeling

The first day with instruments should be focused on playing and singing with the ukulele. As such it is best for the teacher to spend time in *prior* lessons teaching vocabulary, modeling proper care and classroom procedures with the instrument, reviewing conducting cues, and covering any other related material that does necessitate students having the instrument in their hands. By the time students take the instrument out in the classroom, they should already know:

1. Where to find their ukulele and when to retrieve it (if stored in the music room).
2. When, where, and how cases should be opened and stored.
3. What to do with the ukulele once it is out of the case.
4. How to handle the ukulele with care.
5. The name and location of the major parts (head, neck, body).
6. When to begin playing and when to stop.

For the first few lessons, depending on the age of the students, the teacher may wish to have everyone perform the same tasks involving handling the instrument at the same time. One effective way to test for understanding of proper conduct with the ukulele is for the teacher to switch roles with students, demonstrate the *incorrect* behavior, and have the students correct him/her.

Modifying the Instrument

No permanent modifications should be made to a student's ukulele, but small adhesive labels may help in orienting students to the instrument. Since beginners tend to do most of their playing in the first four frets, the fret marker on the fifth fret does not function well as a reference point. Small color-coding dot labels may be placed under the strings where the fingers should be pressed for certain chords or notes (fig. 5.1).

Each color may correspond to a different chord, but it is best to limit the number of markers to three. Likewise, the open strings may be labeled below the bridge or to the *right* of each string above the sound hole (when the instrument is held in playing position the label will appear as if it is directly under the string) (fig. 5.2). The teacher should use discretion in how long such labels remain on the instrument to avoid unnecessary dependence on them.



Figure 5.1. Color-coding dots used as chord position markers.

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