

Simultaneous learning

In the following article Paul Harris introduces his Simultaneous Learning approach to teaching.

Teaching music is, indisputably, one of the most fascinating, enjoyable and important of professions.

Developing the whole musician

As teachers we can inspire, encourage and help our pupils to develop that very special ability to play or sing music independently, giving them a skill that really will promote their self-worth and enhance their lives. We must teach in such a way that our pupils really do get what they are doing, so that they can successfully pursue their music-making *on their own*.

Over the years I have devised and refined a process of teaching I call **Simultaneous Learning**. It's proactive rather than reactive. It makes use of our imagination and powers of creativity. It's fun and develops the whole musician. It can be used whether teaching individuals, small groups or whole classes. *Simultaneous Learning* is a process – more a philosophy really, even a way of life! And it's not difficult to do. In brief, here's what it's about ...

Rather than allowing teaching to be something of a passive affair, waiting for our pupils to make mistakes which we then correct (a rather tedious, lifeless and frustrating way to spend time), we take the lead and lessons go more like this:

- **We teach proactively.** A lesson unfolds as a sequence of activities that we carefully set up with a view on what has gone before and what is to happen next. Each activity will feel natural, inevitable and progressive, and will be dependent on the response of the pupil or pupils to the previous one. This is at the heart of *Simultaneous Learning*.
- **We teach through the piece's ingredients.** Every piece or song is made up of ingredients (key, rhythms, markings, character and so on). The activities we set up are based on exploring the appropriate ingredients – which will depend on what the pupil already understands – the complexity and number of ingredients and what we did last time.
- **We make connections** with all the appropriate areas of music learning (aural, notation, improvisation, scales, technique and so on). We mix and match them depending on what is relevant at the time. We begin to develop pupils who really get to know and understand music. A *Simultaneous Learning* lesson connects one area to another seamlessly, creating an organic kind of learning.
- **We do it all in a very empowering, non-controlling and non-judgmental way.** Though we are continually evaluating and assessing our pupils' responses, the lesson, from the pupils' point of view, does not feel like a succession of personal evaluations and assessments. If we are making judgments on the learning, these judgments focus on the music and the playing – not on the learner. Our pupils do not feel they are being constantly judged. They are, as a result, much more able to enjoy learning.



Simultaneous learning

What's more is that a lesson becomes a collaborative experience. Pupils have travelled with their teachers, both taking pleasure in the ride. The whole experience – for teacher and pupil – is a positive one.

This positivity is hugely important. Because we are setting up learning in such a way that it's being understood as we go along, it's all seen as relevant and progress becomes tangible. And if we can maintain those conditions we will always have positive pupils whose self-esteem will grow and take them in one direction only – towards continual success *whatever their level*.

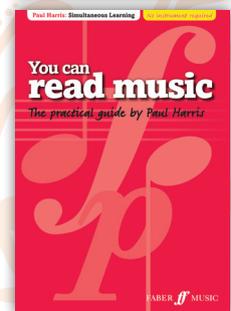
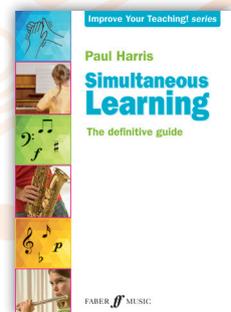
Bad pupils don't exist

And so we've arrived at a very important point. In *Simultaneous Learning* pupils are always *achieving*. Do your pupils always achieve? Or do you have some poor pupils, perhaps even some you might label as *bad*? I'd like you to come to the view that bad pupils don't exist. Pupils are different – some are slow learners and some are fast learners. But the slow learners are not bad learners – we must simply adjust our teaching speed to accommodate our pupil's learning speed. In *Simultaneous Learning* pupils are always achieving. This non-judgemental, proactive style of teaching provides a very practical and flexible method for allowing *all* our pupils the *maximum* of success.

Once teacher and pupil embark on this kind of learning the horizons become increasingly wider. Imaginations are being accessed – and that is where music really lives: *in the imagination*. A music lesson should have very little to do with correcting mistakes or with showing pupils how pieces 'go'. It is certainly more of a long-term approach and it will take a bit of courage, but the rewards will be huge. We are developing pupils' musical independence, the likelihood of them giving up is diminished and we are endowing them with a unique gift for life.

The disheartening and wearisome, 'reacting-to-mistakes' or 'stop-and-correct' style of teaching needs to be put well and truly behind us. It really is time to move on.

For further information about Paul Harris's Simultaneous Learning approach, read *Simultaneous Learning: the definitive guide* and for a practical guide, *You Can Read Music*, published by Faber Music.



Paul Harris has established an international reputation as one of the UK's leading educationalists. As composer and writer he has over six hundred publications to his name, and is in great demand as a workshop leader and adjudicator around the world. Paul's innovative teaching techniques, especially his concept of *Simultaneous Learning*, have found support all over the world and combine thoroughness, imagination and practicality; the defining qualities of his outstandingly successful work.