

Foreword

Paul Harris, as teacher and writer, always asks perceptive questions which revise and refine our view of what it takes to be a good teacher. In his last book, *Improve your teaching!*, Paul proposes a way forward that he terms 'Simultaneous Learning', where both the student and teacher perceive that the lesson is a journey that involves two (or more) people imaginatively investigating the ways of technical, musical and human insight. The benefits are likely to be manifold. Not least, the teacher's own sense of pride in their privileged position percolates through to their students and the learning experience is lifted onto a new plane of potential accomplishment and meaning.

This principle also lies at the core of *Teaching Beginners* and perhaps requires an even greater sense of self-awareness from the teacher of what it really feels like to be a beginner and how fine are the lines between perceived success and failure by the pupil. How many profoundly musical people have unnecessarily lost confidence in their ability to learn to play or sing because of unmotivated and unimaginative teaching in the first few weeks?

This book openly challenges teachers in the way Paul Harris has challenged himself, constructively analysing the satisfaction to be had in trying out new ideas to instil both pleasure and achievement in learning at the most formative stage. Paul's approach gives teachers and pupils' proper 'confidence tricks' (in the best sense), which build self-assurance and develop a vocabulary of discovery.

I know a lot of people find the prospect of teaching people from scratch about as enticing as climbing Everest without oxygen or boots. I for one now feel compelled to try it as a profoundly vibrant activity. Not least, one is reminded that if we were not to recognise the special challenges of this seminal part of musical life – passing on the benefits of our musical experience to brave beginners (in the most thought-provoking and responsible way possible) – the future would indeed be bleak. As an educator, *par excellence*, Paul Harris has no intention of letting that happen. Quite the opposite. Under his guidance, the currency of teaching is justly elevated.

Professor Jonathan Freeman-Attwood
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3 The next stage: beyond the first lesson(s)

A big question that we must now consider is this: at what point should we introduce the tutor book and with it, of course, notation?

When developing our own language skills we learn to speak far sooner than we learn to read. When teaching music we tend to do both virtually at the same time. Many teachers turn to page one of their preferred tutor book almost immediately a new pupil has entered the room, eagerly awaiting the joys and adventures of the very first lesson.

But I hope that we may now feel a principle-led first lesson is a better way in, allowing us to lay down the foundations that could potentially take our pupils a long way down the instrumental-learning path. Teaching based on those principles also allows more freedom in what we actually do and greater potential for more individual and personalised instruction. Consequently we might feel able and confident to save up the tutor book for just a little longer. The great advantage is that we have now taken ownership of the teaching, not the tutor!

The main focus of 'Lesson Two'⁴ is to amplify and develop the work done in the first lesson, which has subsequently been explored further in the first week's practice by the pupil at home. It is the time to monitor whether our pupils have really assimilated and understood the Four Ps. If they have, then we safely move on in the knowledge that the foundations truly are in place. If they haven't, then we must spend more time drawing on our imaginations, creating further activities and helping bring about understanding where there may still be some uncertainty.

Recipe for a second lesson

First of all we should look at how each of the Four Ps may be monitored and developed:

Posture Are there any tensions creeping in? Ask pupils to evaluate their own postures. Check (discreetly) the neck and shoulders and the way pupils are sitting at the piano or standing and holding their instruments. Correct any faults immediately, taking care over the language we might use. Rather than: 'You're not sitting properly! *This* is the correct way!', try the more friendly: 'How about sitting like this? You'll probably find it a lot easier and more comfortable.'

If pupils come to the second clarinet or flute lesson with the wrong hand position or playing the piano with the sides of their fingers or holding the violin with their right hand and bow in the left, we need to take care over how we react. The manner in which we correct faults should be kindly and imaginative. Our pupil

⁴ Don't forget, each of these 'lessons' may take one, two or more weeks.

The rusty old wheelbarrow carries some potatoes

Paul Harris

Bumping along moderately

f

p

With the actual copy out of sight, we set off on our Simultaneous Learning journey making connections:

- *with pulse (1)*: establish a three-in-a-bar pulse and play call-and-response clapping games based on the rhythms of the piece.
- *with pulse (2)*: using the same pulse play more call-and-response where the response (by the pupils) is now different (improvised).
- *with pulse (3)*: play the piece to your pupils. They join in, first clapping the pulse and then conducting (beating) time as you play.
- *with melodic shape*: play the piece (or part of the piece) again and, using graphic, pictorial shapes, pupils 'draw' the melodic shape (in broad outline) in their notebooks. Either just the right hand or both parts!
- *with rhythm*: clap the actual rhythm of the piece in one, two or even four-bar phrases for pupils to copy.
- *with key*: pupils improvise a short piece in C major based on the rhythms used in the preceding activities. Just use the first three notes of the scale (as in the piece). One hand at a time, then hands together.
- *with the scale*: play the scale of C major (the microscale will do: the first three – or preferably – five notes) with an even rhythm and in contrary motion. Play the scale *f*, *p*, and getting louder (the dynamics used in the piece).
- *with staccato*: add staccato to the above then improvise a little piece using the first three notes above and below middle C major (both hands as in this piece) and some of the rhythms. Add a crescendo.