

Paul Harris asks ...

Why am I a music teacher?

In the following article renowned educationalist Paul Harris explains why being a music teacher can be a most rewarding career.

When was the last time you thought 'why am I a music teacher?' Of course I know we've all got the mortgage to pay, but I hope *that's* not the reason! Or at least if it's part of the reason, then it's only a very small part!

Spend a minute now thinking why you *are* teaching music. No, really! Stop reading and have a think!

I'd love to know your answer – but I'm not going to try to second-guess. There are many reasons why people teach music, and they are (mostly) good reasons. Instead, I'm going to try to explain why I love teaching music and let's see whether there's any overlap and agreement.

First of all, I like music. I like playing it and I like listening to it. A lot. Both occupations make me feel good. There are lots of deeper psychological, social, intellectual and cultural reasons for that, but they needn't worry us over-much. Many have tried to speculate on what music is for – what music *is*. Some have taken a scientific stance, some an emotional one, some a philosophical one. Many great minds have addressed the question. But isn't it interesting that after all this time we still don't really know. So let's leave it at that. I like music and I want to share with others something I know can enhance their lives. Similarly, I hope that a major part of your reason for teaching music is simply that you love it and want to share your passion.

But there *is* something else: something very important. In a world, especially for young people, that is dominated by exam stress, a world that seems to encourage endless judgmental thinking, that causes so many to feel that they are under-achieving, we, as music teachers, really can do just a little something about it. We can help our pupils *really* achieve. We can help them build that hugely important self-esteem (not ego) that will give them confidence and strength.

To do this does require a particular belief and a particular approach to teaching. Firstly, to uncover that belief let me ask you a simple question. After eight years of playing the flute, two pupils take an exam. The first pupil passes grade one (and is delighted), and the other passes grade eight (also delighted). Who has made the greater achievement? Note I'm not asking who has passed the 'higher' exam – and what a lot of received opinion and cultural indoctrination there would be in that question! The answer is simple – both have achieved equally. That's what is important: we can help make both pupils enjoy their own success at *their* level and, along the way, we can try to teach them not to make the destructive (and meaningless) comparisons that can spoil it all.



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We are all wired differently. One person's grade one really is another's grade eight. We *all* move at different paces and it's so important to acknowledge that fact. You're probably thinking, that's all very well but that's not how things are in the real world. Well, we've got to start changing things! And there's one very effective way we can: believing that the process is more important than the outcome. The process in getting from zero to grade one, or zero to grade eight must be rich, elaborate, exciting, absorbing and engaging. If it is all those things then whilst the outcome *may* be important it doesn't take on an importance that trumps the process.

And how do we make 'the process' all those things? Many readers will know my approach to instrumental and singing teaching which I call **Simultaneous Learning**. It's a process where we are continually making connections to deepen and inspire understanding. It's a process where we teach the ingredients of music to the degree whereby our pupils really 'know' and therefore can apply them in all contexts. That's teaching. And we are continually drawing on our rich imaginations (we all have them) to create ever more activities to help each pupil get from their A (can't do it) to their B (can do it), whatever their particular pace and however their particular brains are wired.

So that's why I love teaching music. That's why I'm a music teacher. I want to ensure that all my pupils love *their* music and can really enjoy their ongoing achievements. And the mortgage gets paid too.

For further information about Paul Harris's Simultaneous Learning approach, read the following titles 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.

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