

Introducing music to the students with various learning styles

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Learning style has been used to describe how students perceive and process information, and research on learning style has concluded that when teachers accommodate their teaching to match their students' learning style, the students' achievement will be enhanced.

I would like to illustrate how I taught the same piece, "Gigue" from the *Sonata in F Major for Flute and Harpsichord* by G.F. Handel, to students with different learning styles through a number of varied activities that include technique, theory, reading, and so forth.

Student Case1: Teerat Ketmee, Matthayom 6 is from Horwang School, Bangkok, Thailand. He has played flute for 7 years, and he is a classic example of Golay's **Bear** because of the following:

- He is calm and quiet
- He completes everything in the assignments
- He repeats pieces for however many weeks it takes for him to thoroughly master the pieces to his satisfaction
- He is interested in critiquing his own performance. And, he needs to "make sure" before moving on to the next step. He often stops after playing one phrase or section, and asks "Was it good?" "Did I have a nice tone?"



For the past year, Teerat has been practicing only one piece, *Carmen Fantasy* by Francois Borne, for an audition for a youth orchestra, a youth wind band, and also for a college of music. So, when I introduced Handel's flute sonata to him, as one would expect from this type of learner, he became quite nervous. He didn't want to venture into new piece before completing his current piece. However, being also a **visual learner**, Teerat could see that Handel's piece is less difficult than the *Carmen Fantasy*. This recognition eased his anxiety.

In keeping with his temperament, the lessons revolve around a set routine, beginning with playing major and minor scales with arpeggios in 2-3 octaves. For this lesson, I told him to play an F major scale and an arpeggio in triplet time. I wanted him to have the feeling of triplet rhythm because the whole movement is in triplet rhythm.

I gave the music to him and told him to take a look through the entire piece without playing it first. Being a visual learner, I was confident that Teerat would not miss the notes and be able to sight read accurately. However, knowing that a step-by-step introduction and clear expectations would help the Bear learner, I cautioned him about the accidentals in the piece by asking him, "Are there any accidentals or any key signature changes?" Then, I let him play one time to check the notes and accidentals. It would be fine for him to make mistakes, but he had to tell me what his mistakes were. He found some passages where he made

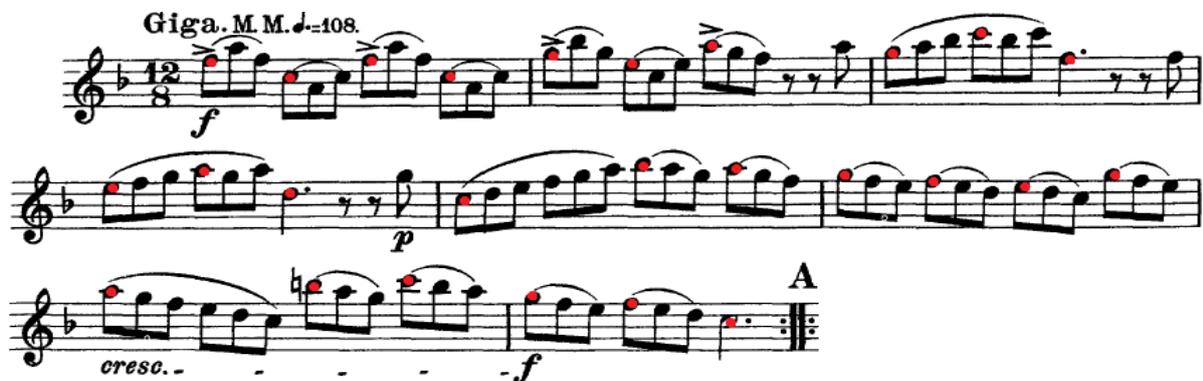
mistakes, and some difficult places where he have to practice. As customary for visual learners, he marked ‘visual’ reminders in his score (Example 1.)

Example 1. Haydn, Sonata in F Major for Flute and Harpsichord, Gigue, m.14



Next, I asked him “What are the primary notes of this melody?” After, we discussed where the primary notes were (the notes with red dots in the Example 2), we played together. I played all the notes and my student played only the melody (red dots.) By doing this, Teerat was able to see how the melody line was filled by ornamentation.

Example 2. Haydn, Sonata in F Major for Flute and Harpsichord, Gigue, mm.1-8.



When I felt that he understood where the melody was, we switched what we played before. I played only the melody line and he played all the notes.

In my experience, most students do not play triplets evenly. So my next step was to ask him to play the whole piece again with an all tonguing, kinesthetic approach. When he tongues everything, he cannot rush. And, in order to play triplets evenly, his tongue and fingers must be together perfectly. He had to play through the piece several times to get accustomed to it.

The final step I took with Teerat was to illustrate the characteristics of a *Gigue*. I described to him that Giges are a lively baroque dance in a contrapuntal texture. In early French theatre, it was customary to end a play with a gigue and complete the theatrical performance with music and dancing. A gigue is usually in 3/8 or in one of its compound meter derivatives, such as 6/8, 6/4, 9/8 or 12/8, although there are some giges written in other meters (for example, the gigue from Bach’s first *French Suite (BWV 812)*, was written in 4/4) and often have an accent on the third beat of each bar. The entire movement is in a compound time signature. Most of the rhythms are as illustrated in Example 3.

Example 3. Gigue or Giga rhythm



To help him learn the proper meter, I had Teerat clap the rhythms of the music. Then, I demonstrated the piece phrase by phrase for him to imitate. Following this process, I let Teerat play and I did the clapping. I made mistakes on purpose to check whether he knew the correct way of playing—auditory discrimination. Secondly, I told him to press the keys of his flute while I played the piece. (Pressing only the keys also makes a rhythmic sound), and from this routine, he gained muscle memory.

I believe that students can play with more self-assurance when they understand the correct style. As a closing to his lesson, I showed him a baroque dance from YouTube. Watching the dance and music of the time working together is well received by visual learners, and they tend to retain the information better in this manner.



(<http://youtu.be/2ZW4HKQhGFk>)

After a thorough and well-sequenced instruction with clear expectations of each step, Teerat began to follow the rhythms and dynamics of the music better, with the correct stylistic interpretation and confidence.

Student Case2: Angela Park is in the 7th Grade of the New International School, Bangkok, Thailand. She has played flute for 3 years, and I believe she is more of an “Ape” because of the following:

- She is very active and playful
- She is intuitive and can play without too much practice
- She likes short, achievable rewards. If she completed her assignments, I would buy her a Mc’s Double Cheese burger set



Angela shows evidence of a learning modality similar to Teerat, but with an Ape temperament. As a Visual learner, she has good reading skills. However, being an Ape, she finds it a nuisance and is bothered if I ask her to look through the entire score before playing it. Following a step-by-step instruction of the piece does not work well with the students with this temperament. She would normally respond to my request with “Can we just play?” So we began the music lessons by just playing right away.

After playing just a couple notes, she started complaining. “Why is this so difficult?” Or “I cannot play!” So as not to let her lose motivation in learning a new piece, I would tell her that today we would play only a couple bars or just one line, and we would play slowly note by note. By nature, Apes respond well to short achievable challenges.

After she finished the first line, I told her to play again with a faster tempo. After playing only 3 bars she said that she could not play again! She spoke “ไม่ได้” in Thai which meant “Cannot.” Understanding her playful nature, I pretended that she meant “No, don’t stop!” I kept teasing and kept the learning process fun for her to play, and it worked! She finished a half page of the piece.

She asked me to put the video clip link on her Facebook, and write “I know you can play it.” She said she wants her friends to see it – the showing off nature of Apes. So I did as she asked and put the video clip on YouTube so she could listen to the piece and experience how its sounds when a flute plays with piano. To encourage her to practice this piece, I also wrote “I’m sure you can play this very well.”



Student Case 3: Suppanat Itsarangkul na Ayuthaya is a M.1 student from Bangkok Christian College, Bangkok, Thailand. He is in the group learning, English Immersion Program (EIP) for M.1 students. He has played flute for 1 year, and he stands out as an “Owl” because of the following:

- He always asks a lot of Questions
- He is very strong willed: if he’s not sure, he will not play
- He thinks too much about everything



Being an Owl and Kinesthetic learner by nature, Suppanat continually plays or does things that he thinks he needs to do, like cleaning his flute, while I am teaching fingering. Then when it is time for him to play, I have to teach him about the fingering again because he was not paying full attention.

A kinesthetic learner benefits from a hands-on game format approach; therefore, when I introduced the compound time signature (6/8), we played a card game about compound time signature. The cards signify groups of notes which he has to clap. Additionally, rote presentation of the various elements of a piece is effective for this type of learner, so I begin lessons by letting him imitate what I play. I often play intervals or scales from the lesson pieces, for example: an F major scale from measures 5 to 6. Then, I give the music to him and let him say the note while he’s pressing the flute keys. After that, I let him play the piece with tonguing articulation. As a kinesthetic learner, this helps him develop muscle memory. (Tongue and fingers)

He has a lot of trouble focusing on pieces, because he is highly curious and has unending questions. I have a difficulty dealing with “Owl” students. I like students to ask questions, but not all the time. I have to remind myself that “he is an owl, he’s loves asking questions.”

Student Case 4: Athiwat Lerkamnouychoke is an M.2 student from Bangkok Christian College, Bangkok, Thailand. He has played flute for 4 years. His personality temperament is a “**Dolphin**” because of the following:



- He enjoys talking about his life at school
- He gets bored with the warm-up routines
- He responds well to positive environments

As one would expect from this type of learner, Athiwat thrives on personal relationships. He tries to play well to receive complements from me. And, he cares very much about his family. When he gets bored or finds some difficulty, if I say “I will go to talk with your mom!” he will be back on the track. He is a talented good boy and I am never disappointed by his playing. He is one of my favorite flute students in the Bangkok Christian College school band. Everyday he loves to share and talk about his interests or what he is learning in school. Athiwat is also a “**visual learner.**” He can sight read all the exercises I give him.

Dolphins normally get bored with a “skill and drill routine” approach to learning, so I let him play through a piece without any scales or rhythmic exercise to prepare for the pieces. Also, reading through the score is often what a visual student likes to do as an initial activity. In addition, I asked him to find a way to be expressive with the music by asking him questions like “What articulation will you use for this music?” I wanted to see how he would play, what articulation he would use. I let him sing the melody line to enhance his Visual learning style and I let him draw pictures or signs to remind himself of Dynamic changes, Tempo marks, etc. Then I showed him video clips and scores of the pieces so he could see the structure of the music and hear what the piece sound like. I think this helped him understand and gain more confidence with the music. I let him play all the notes with a tonguing articulation to make sure that he did not rush and that he knew how to divide and play the triplets equally. Since Dolphins respond well to supportive environments, even if he made mistakes, I would say “It’s good, try again with a slower tempo.”

Most of the lessons are fairly similar. However, for some students, I need more time to get to know their personality temperaments and Learning Styles. After I learned about the varying personality temperaments and learning styles, I have a lot more confidence when I teach. I know how to prepare lessons for my students and, by understanding their individual learning styles, help them improve as musicians. Above all, I want my students to love music as I do.