

Feedback Joana May 2025

Lesson 1 Sole

-What do you think of these moments?

18' Time to experiment. To further internalise whether the melodic line goes up or down, I propose to her to draw the line (adding symbol). First of all, she simply draws with a line, to see how it approaches. Then we sing it again with the help of the piano and she herself realises that she has not been very accurate (because she is more familiar with playing by ear but not with the theory behind). Sometimes she didn't get it right when the melody went up or down.

-What do you think about drawing the melodic contour in a drawing? Do you think it is an effective method? Do you think the correct steps have been followed during this first lesson? *(please note the red marks on the lesson plans)*

I think drawing the melodic contour is helpful in this case, as it is such a long melody. The notation can serve as a 'map' for the melody, so that Sole can more easily keep track of where she is. Since the tune is so difficult, immediate transformation of what she hears into what she plays is not yet feasible: it is more a process of 'trial and error'. Still I think this song is good choice, as Sole knows it well and she likes it, which keeps her going even if she runs into difficulties. You approached drawing the melodic contour very specifically, namely by 'coding' the semitones and whole tones in the length of the dashes (1 dot for semitones, 2 dots for whole tones). I think this aligns well with the interval structure of the scales, which Sole is now also learning. As Sole is good at singing, and as she has already found the first phrase of the song by ear, I don't feel there is big risk that 'her eyes will dominate her ears', or that she will end up approaching playing by ear to 'cognitively', thus preventing direct links between ear and hand to develop.

A general recommendation would be to start the learning process of a tune by letting Solo discover and explore the tonality of it. As you already wrote in your reflections, this is far from easy in this song: there is a lot of chromaticism in it, and the first two bars are in Bb-minor. This implies that you have to introduce her to two tonalities, namely F-minor and Bb-minor. Still I think it is always helpful for students to first become familiar with the key of the piece, before starting the process of finding the tune by ear, because it limits the options. Also, knowing the scale of the tune can add to the sense of 'gravity' (pull towards the root). I read in your lesson plans and reflections that later on you introduced the scale of F-minor and did some ear-training exercises in it.

Lesson 2 Sole

-What do you think of these moments?

30' Use of recordings

I like it! Making use of recordings makes pupils familiar with 'real' music, performed by 'real' musicians. It also helps to create a 'mental auditory representation' of the song, which also helps to obtain an expressive performance. You explained well how this performance speeds up and down (rubato).

47' Refinement exercise by modeling

Your objective was to help Sole become more accurate rhythmically. You approached this by playing together on two pianos. As far as I could hear, you also taught her how to conduct a 3-beat pattern (?). I liked how you approach teaching this rhythm mostly **procedurally** ('learning by doing') rather than declaratively ('learning by explanation'). More specifically, you did not ask Sole to count out loud, or to calculate the note values of the notation, but you mostly did it through singing and playing together. As you know, this is, in my opinion, the most natural approach to teaching rhythm.

57' Working on expressiveness

Your objective is to help Sole develop her legato. I think it is nice to also address the quality of her playing, in addition to helping her learn the tune. Your instruction to create more connection between the notes was timely, as Sole could immediately apply it. After this, you did the 'leader-follower' game. Nice!

Lesson 3 Sole

-What do you think of these moments?

56' Once the notes have been discovered through lyrics + sound, I think it is a good time to also sing the song with na na na na, with ABC or solfa. Now Sole can start working with other names and start to associate the score. She should also continue to reinforce her memory. I present her with the Lead Sheet, and tell her that she can practice naming the notes. Next class we will work on the lead sheet together.

-To play by ear. Is it better to establish the working map from the beginning? or is it better to work from the mere intuition of pitch matching? I have found that conceptualising it can be an obstacle (comparing echo patterns lesson 2 and 3).

Is 'working map' the same as 'scale'? If so, it is a good idea to introduce the working map in an early stage, as it limits the number of potential pitches, and creates more orientation. I would think it is okay to introduce the pitch/key names, since this enables you to communicate more easily about what keys to play. You want to avoid the note names to become in-between steps in the transformation of sounds to actions (Sound-Name-Action), as this would slow it down. So, probably you should avoid too much singing the 'labels' (note names) along with playing, at least in early stages of the learning process. You did this, as in lessons 1 and 2 you were not yet doing pitch/key names. This lesson you introduced this, which also makes sense, because you don't want Sole to experience too much challenge (see below).

-Sole is still unsure whether notes are going up or down. I keep wondering how I can work on it in a variety of ways. In the end it's a question of musical memory.

Yes, it is. I would not worry about this too much, because associating the labels 'up' and 'down' to the auditory experience of melodic directions is a skill that grows over time, as a result of 'exposure'. It is comparable to associating the verbal label 'blue' to the visual experience of seeing blue objects: young children associate the word to the experience as a result of being surrounded by other people who repeatedly use the word when referring to specific objects. Over time, as a result of repeated exposure, children start using the word themselves. So, I would recommend just continuing the training, and not trying to 'fix' Sole's difficulty labelling melodic direction accurately. It will grow.

-Sole tells me that she is worried that she is going to forget the music without a music score. This is the limitation of playing by ear.

Is is both a limitation **and** a healthy challenge! Yes, without a score you rely more on memorisation. So, you can get lost more easily. However, over time you also train your musical memory. The price you pay (more mistakes initially) is immediate, the benefits (better memorisation, more easy correction of mistakes, and so on) take much longer to emerge. So, as a teacher you have to find a **balance** between challenge and comfort: if you insist she does everything by ear without any notation (not even proto-notation), it is probably too much challenge and will be stressful, resulting in too little musical rewards (success experiences). On the other hand, if she stays within her comfort zone (always having the support of the score, which serves as an external memory), the learning process of the important aural skills will be slow.

One tip: it can be helpful if you **validate** the challenge (and sometimes even stress) pupils experience when they face difficult tasks such as playing by heart and/or by ear. Validation means that you acknowledge that the task is difficult and how this results in mistakes (the event), which can be frustrating (the emotion resulting from the event). This teacher response works better than trying to somehow convince learners not to experience frustration/stress, as they are human beings, and experiencing negative emotions as a result of mistakes is a natural phenomenon. This way, they know that the

fact they experience emotions does not imply there is something wrong with them, it is just a natural part of the learning process. If you are interested in validation as a communication/instruction strategy, you can look it up on the internet, there are many sources on it. But it is a bit off topic for your research...

Lesson 4 Sole

-What do you think of these moments?

40'-48' We review the entire piece together, playing and singing. We work from the lyrics to the sound of the piano, without specifying the notes in solmisation or without much theory.

Nice! I think here you are addressing the immediate transformation of sounds into action. As you do not train note names or solmisation, Sole has to discover a lot by herself, and therefore the process is mostly 'trial-and-error', which I think is the way it should be at this stage.

53' We start to think of patterns (e.g. 'Your loneliness', descending chord with seventh). The intention is for her to group the notes she already knows well from the melody into patterns, and also to try to visualise the melodic contour by following the score (although she does not yet know how to read sheet music fluently).

In this part of the lesson you introduce two instructions for homework practice: in the first place you instruct Sole to play and sing along the pitch names. Secondly, you suggest her to think in groups of notes. The latter instruction makes a lot of sense, and probably Sole will find it easy to apply, as she is familiar with the lyrics, and the (sub)sentences in the lyrics coincide with the musical phrase structure. She will probably find the first exercise more difficult to do, but it is still a useful one. However, this mode of playing (reading the score, singing the pitch name simultaneously with playing the note on the piano) is probably addressing a more slow type of processing the musical information (reading-pitch-notename-key). So, perhaps it is good to 'counterbalance' this type of practice with more intuitive types of practice, that rely more on the immediate link between sound and action, such as what you did earlier in this lesson. Perhaps it is good to also include this mode of practicing in her homework task, as adults usually prefer ways of practicing that make them feel more secure as they can exert 'conscious control' and rely on their eyes rather than on their ears.

Lesson 5 Sole

-What do you think of these moments?

16' playing pattern by pattern. My idea was that we would play and sing each pattern to internalise it, with the support of the score, but she began to ask me questions and we moved on to other questions, such as the internalisation of the tempo.

Even though this way of working is probably not specifically aimed at developing the immediate transformation of sound into action, I still think this exercise is fine: Score – Singing (with your support) – Play (and fix issues like fingerings and accents). As this is an individual lesson, there is a lot of space for addressing questions by Sole, and it is good that you do this. I think the questions she asks are relevant, so why not? After all, you wanted to achieve **simultaneous learning**, which means that all activities are linked to the repertoire, which also includes working on these aspects. So, based on this principle, it makes sense to spend time on these aspects too.

56' Introducing the left hand. I suggest that she can start by simply singing the bass, thus creating an appropriate mental scheme (without worrying about whether the chord is M or m yet). I introduced one of the most famous progressions in the world (the circle of fifths). We listen to the bass movement several times, I harmonise it for her and send her some theory videos to help her understand the progression.

Again, I think your teaching approach makes a lot of sense. It helps that you initially reduce the accompaniment to just the bass line, postponing the introduction of the corresponding chords to later. It is nice to hear that Sole corrected herself by ear when she accidentally played D-natural instead of D-flat! I guess this shows that she is already starting to trust her ears. Nice that you gave her the video describing the theoretical backgrounds of the 'Sequence of Falling Fifths', because this enables Sole to study this by herself. I feel she is ready to learn the concepts behind this chord progression, even though she has very little practical experience playing it.