

How do I survive my scary teacher?

I've been a flute teacher for almost 25 years now and a Suzuki flute teacher for almost 6 years but after all those years of teaching and after the hundreds of pupils that I have seen I still come across situations in which I don't know how to react.

I now think of my pupil Mary who has problems concentrating from the beginning until the end of a song. When she misses one note, she continues playing complete nonsense note by note. It's just like her mind has gone off doing things elsewhere and her fingers are on their own, doing everything they have learned in the past four years and simultaneously. I look at her and try to figure out if she knows what is happening. When asked if she liked the way she played the song she says: "Yes, but I think I missed a few notes" completely unaware of the nonsense she played. I would love to take a little mystery tour inside her head and follow all those little wires that made her play all those funny notes.

Maybe it's an escape for her to dash off to the playground in her head instead of taking the risk of making a mistake again.

Another example: I often play a game with two of my pupils. They have to put down the right rhythm cards to the song played. One girl is very confident, she can find out for herself what cards she needs and she can correct her own mistakes. The other girl is so anxious to get it right that she blocks her ears and only wants to look at her fellow pupil or at me, hoping she can tell by looking at us what the right cards must be. Even when I sit next to her and play the rhythm again for her and when I help her by asking questions she turns away from me to look at the other girl's rhythm cards. It is hard to believe that such a harmless game can cause so much stress for a girl of 7 years of age.

Am I really such a scary teacher?

We all have our own tactics how to deal with difficult situations. When we are scared a lot of adrenaline rushes through our system and thus we prepare for fly or fight. Either way is not a very suitable reaction when you want to learn something.

John Holt (a schoolteacher) describes in his book 'How children fail' * what we teachers do to make children scared and what children do to survive in a classroom situation. A classroom is not the same as music lesson but the tactics children use, when they feel they have to do things right and they are not sure they can do it, are the same.

The easiest thing to do is go off daydreaming. You can't get it right because you're not there. This is what I've seen a lot with small groups. They all work very hard and are concentrated but all at once there is always one who is looking away and not paying attention. Maybe he is bored but probably he just needed a break because the pressure was building up. Good for him to take his own break.

Another tactic is to distract the teacher. Who doesn't remember the moments in classroom when you hadn't done one part of your homework and you were desperately trying to make your teacher forget that part of the homework? You can talk about your birthday or about the cat of the daughter of the aunt of your neighbor. I have pupils who simply refuse to do what I ask them. In a way they are telling me: "I am not ready yet, so I won't do what you ask me to do right now."

Another tactic when you're asked a question, is just say nothing and look puzzled. Hoping your teacher is going to help you and when your teacher has almost spelled out the right answer, you can safely give the right answer.

I don't think that my pupils are afraid of me or that I ask too much of the children, but I do recognize these behaviors described above.

What can we do to minimize stress? Must we stand aside more and let children learn by their own?

Must I make success easy by making the task small and easy or is it more important to change the attitude about failure. We make mistakes all our life. When we learn to walk we fall, but we never decide to stop walking, because we can't cope with failure. We try again and again. When we are small we know nothing about failure or making mistakes. We want to walk whether there are cheering mums around or not.

How must we translate this to the Suzuki lessons? How much should we cheer the successes of our children when we know that they have to deal with failure too? Don't we make our children dependant of the opinion of others by giving them compliments and stickers when we say that they have earned one? Maybe we should leave it to the children to give compliments and stickers to themselves when they feel they have earned them. And maybe we should only cheer when they have heard their own mistakes and when they use the right tactics to tackle a problem and instead of giving up. When they succeed they will receive their own rewards from themselves.

Maybe our main task is to teach children to teach themselves and make them aware of what they hear.

After all those years I did learn that you can only make changes in your playing when you can hear it in your head first. I can tell the children how I think the piece should sound but when they don't have a proper aural image it will not sound at all. I can tell a pupil to play crescendo or diminuendo, but without this image, it will sound like someone playing louder and softer instead of someone making music.

John Holt introduces in his book the word producer-thinker. He uses the word producer to describe the student who is only interested in getting the right answers, and who makes more or less uncritical use of rules and formulae to get them; he calls thinker the student who tries to think about the meaning, the reality, of whatever it is he is working on.

We are all too happy with children who want to please us and who do what we say without asking why. Let's revalue the children who always ask: " why should I do this, why do I have to learn to spell or learn mathematics or the names of the notes." Let us encourage them to think about what they are doing and to figure out things on their own.

When I studied flute at the conservatory in Amsterdam, I had piano lessons once a week with a stout old lady called Deborah, who was very severe. I was a little bit afraid of her. I studied very hard every day and the lessons went okay. One week I hadn't studied much and I was not looking forward to the lesson. With sweating hands I climbed the stairs to the piano room. I looked at my teacher and she looked scarier and taller than ever. I had to start with a scale, which I normally played without mistakes. Of course I made one mistake after another and my hands began to sweat even more. My teacher who didn't have her day either started to push me and let me play the scale over and over again. At one point I lost control over my hands, I couldn't find the keys on the piano anymore and I had no idea anymore what I was doing. I went completely blank, a scary sensation for me. I stopped and asked if I could have a break, before trying again. After that I could play my scale at my own pace without any mistakes.

Sometimes when I see my pupils sweating and ploughing from one note to the other I think of my piano teacher Deborah and I tell them this story.

I hope one day I will find a way to teach my pupils and have the answer to all their problems. No, wrong attitude. I hope I will find the way to let them answer their own questions.

I still have a long way to go.

Caroline Tuijtel is a flute teacher in Holland. She studied flute at the conservatory at Amsterdam and The Hague. She started her Suzuki training in 1998 with Anke van der Bijl in Holland and hopes to do her final exam this summer.

- 'How children fail' by John Holt. Isbn: 0-440-53837-8

complete ; 1 van de 2 in deze zin verwijderen?

Children and adults vervangen door **people of every person**?

They give stickers **to** themselves.

Ik neem aan dat je **aural image** bedoelt? Wellicht zou iemand een **oral image** van een bep.embouchure kunnen hebben,.....

Groetjes,Anke

Blijft lastig dat engels.

Groetjes, Caroline