

Answers to the most frequently asked questions by teachers during  
the 10th A.P.P.C. Conference in Wagga Wagga , 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> of July 2011,  
on the subject of Sight-Reading at the keyboard.

by Joan Bevan

**Q. Why do you think that there has been so little research done and so little progress made in the area of sight-reading over the centuries?**

A. There are many reasons, but two stand out:-

Firstly, the simple fact that you don't have to be a proficient sight reader in order to be an excellent pianist, musician and educator... and

Secondly, not enough research has been done into the psychological effect of sound on the human psyche or the behaviour of the senses in regard to the successful teaching of this vital skill.

**Q. I was shocked by the percentage of teachers (at least 80%) who raised their hands when you asked the question “How many of you were taught to sight read separate hands and have continued to teach your own students this way?” Does your research consider this to be at the heart of poor sight-reading skills at the keyboard?**

A. Yes! very definitely... The Grand Staff is a vertical replica of the horizontal middle three octaves of the keyboard from left to right, so students need to think of the Grand Staff as either a four voice choir B.T.A.S or a four layered cake (chocolate, caramel, strawberry and vanilla) so that they get used to the idea that the reading process has to be vertical from bottom to top, bass to treble, both hands together. This is because it is a proven fact that it is impossible for the eyes and mind to read two melodic/horizontal lines (bass & treble) at the same time.

**Q. Do you think that good sight-readers have a natural talent?**

A. It just appears that way!.. I truly believe that most talented sight readers have acquired this skill over many years, with patience, perserverance and persistence and a great love of the piano - not because of correct training procedures. In my case I was just blessed that my grandfather taught me to read from a hymn book and never allowed me to read or play separate hands.

**Q. How difficult did you find it personally to change your own style of teaching and how did you get around your more advanced students that had not been brought up with the Say & Play method?**

A. Changing the habits of a lifetime was not as difficult as I had imagined. It was easy with the younger students because they had no prior knowledge and were happy to do what I asked of them. As for my older students I came through the back door. I asked them to help me evaluate a new and experimental method of teaching sight-reading skills... It worked like the proverbial charm!

**Q. If, as your research suggests, the art of harmonic reading and its associate skill ‘playing by touch’ is not being taught – should sight-reading skills be examined?**

A. No!..I don’t think we can justify examining a skill that is acquired rather than taught!

**Q. Why do you insist on verbalization during the first three years of training?**

A. It is the only way a teacher can be absolutely one hundred percent sure that the student’s brain is in gear at all times and that they are using their senses in a behavioural pattern that will lead to good sight-reading skills.

**Q. How important is parental involvement?**

A. Critical! Without a knowledgeable parents supervision during home practice students will always protect their EARS by taking the easy way out, which is reading and practicing separate hands.

**Q. Do you encourage your parents to sit in on lessons?**

A. I insist on it for at least the first three years of training. If this is not possible I give the parents written instructions on what I expect from home practice and encourage them to speak to me personally if there are any problems.

**Q. Can you add other repertoire to the Say & Play sight-reading training program?**

A. Absolutely! As long as it is in line with the key, hand position and principal being taught. For the first six years of their tuition (primary school 6-12 yrs) students are learning HOW to sight read, so the first time you place a piece of music in front of them that they cannot read and play both hands together at sight they will panic, make numerous note errors that the ear will not tolerate, the eyes will drop and they will be forced to go back to separate hand practice.

**Q. How do we find out more about your research and Say & Play sight-reading training method?**

A. All the relevant information can be found on the A.P.P.C. website or by attending workshops... The Say & Play.com website will be online by Nov/Dec 2011.

**Q. Could you remind us of your parting statement?**

A. With pleasure...Applause dies away,  
Trophies gather dust and  
Winners are soon forgotten, but

Basic skills, well learned are with you forever!