

## MINI ESSAY 24

### Super Awesome Sight Readers! Part 2: False Assumptions

By Dr. Julie Knerr

In Part 1 of this series (See Mini Essay 23), I presented the idea that it takes about three years of persistent work for a student to become a fluent reader. The remainder of this series will focus on what we should teach in relation to reading in those important first three years.

I believe that teachers, and method book creators, often do not think enough about this important question: **How should students think about reading notation?**

In my opinion, many method books do not provide a systematic or thorough enough approach to reading. Too often, a method book will have a page or two of the interval of a 2nd, introduce some letter names on the staff, have a page of 3rds, a few more letter names, and then put 2nds and 3rds together. The student is left wondering, "Am I supposed to be reading the notes or the intervals?" There is also not enough reinforcement of either note names or intervals to lead to mastery.

**This results in the student forming his own assumptions about reading.**

If he forms wrong assumptions, he will come to think about reading in the wrong way.

The following is an example of what I mean by developing wrong assumptions about reading:

The student thinks, "Wow. I can't keep track of all these notes. There are too many. And every page of the book has even more. And then the teacher says something about up or down, and 2nds and 3rds, and note names???? I'm not sure what I'm supposed to look at, but I don't want my teacher to think I'm dumb, so I'll have to figure out a way to do it myself..."

I know. I think this one note here with the line through it is C, and I've noticed that it is usually played with Finger 1. And then sometimes the notes go up, and most of the time it is to Finger 2. But sometimes it is Finger 3. So I'll just go with Finger 2, and if my teacher makes that noise like I'm wrong and raises her eyebrows, then I know it's really Finger 3... That's the way to do it! 1 is C. 2 is up, and eyebrows means Finger 3!"

Oh no! Wrong assumptions!!

Often the student is blamed for not being a natural reader, when it was really the method or teaching approach that was flawed. The student develops the idea that reading music is not fun and that he is bad at it. In extreme cases, this persists through graduate school. It is so important to lay the foundation correctly when developing a student's relationship to the notated score!

Students aren't the only ones that are susceptible to wrong assumptions about reading. One assumption many methods or teachers seem to have traditionally subscribed to is:

**To read music, the most important thing is for students to know all the notes names.**

**Truth: Much more than note names is involved in reading.**

Again and again on Facebook threads, teachers will bemoan the fact that a student does not know the note names and therefore can't read music. In actuality, if we think about reading more deeply, we will arrive at the fact that **note names alone are not enough.**

**What else is involved? See Part 3...**



