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Teaching Kids to Sing
Chapter 1: Vocal Pedagogy for Young Singers
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Summary

- I. Philosophical and Historical Perspectives
 - A. Some teachers have thought it may be inappropriate to teach singing to children via formal vocal instruction, due to the thought that young children would cause damage to their singing voices.
 - B. With age-appropriate techniques, children can be taught to sing safely and correctly.
 - C. Sataloff and Spiegel (1989) recommend an approach to singing based on the gradual development of vocal musculature and control and advice against vocal abuse
 - D. Singing is a learned behavior and allows the opportunity for everyone to participate. It enhances the quality of life, and those who participate feel better in mind and body. Singing is a form of communication and creates a bond among those who sing together. It provides a way for people to celebrate life and promotes cooperative learning. It helps people to understand others and can develop an aesthetic experience for those who participate.
- II. The Song Approach
 - A. This method emphasized primarily on singing songs, then on technique.
 - B. This approach only teaches a song repertoire and neglects reading, notating, and theory.
 - C. Elementary methods texts used this approach more than any other age.
 1. This method neglected technical areas of vocal quality, registers, breath management, dynamic levels, duration, and range.
 2. The mastery of singing was not presented as a developmental skill at this age.
 3. Because of the amount of students who never learned to sing due to this method, teachers began to believe that some students could not be taught to sing, and that it was harmful to teach children to sing.
 - D. The bel canto approach teaches students to sing by strictly devoting class time to vocal exercises, and little time to singing songs.
- III. The Roots of Systematic Instruction
 - A. This method of instruction began in the United States during the early singing school movement.
 - B. Lowell Mason became America's first public school music teacher and was an advocate of this method of instruction.
 1. He is considered to be the "father of singing among the children."

2. He was responsible for the first formal inclusion of music in the Boston public schools in 1838.
 3. He put together the first music methods, *Music of the Boston Academy of Music Instruction in the Elements of Vocal Music on the System of Pestalozzi*, first published in 1834.
 4. He believed that singing instruction should begin when a child begins reading and should continue throughout a child's education.
- IV. Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Writers
- A. Emil Behnke and Lennox Browne
 1. *The Child's Voice* (1885) recommended that vocal instruction commence between six and ten years of age, with a great emphasis given to proper breathing.
 2. These authors warned against "collarbone" breathing in children, and making sure to develop "midriff" and "rib" breathing instead.
 3. They also advocated the use of the same training for both girls and boys prior to puberty.
 - B. Francis E. Howard
 1. *The Child Voice in Singing* (1895) emphasized all teachers to be knowledgeable of child vocal production.
 2. He also stated that if good singing habits were taught, students' singing would improve.
 - C. E.H. Curtis
 1. Wrote a series of training manuals with H. R. Palmer called the Palmer-Curtis series.
 2. *Children's Voices* (1895) recommended specific exercises and vocalizes for vocal development, and that half the class time be dedicated to vocal instruction.
 - D. John W. Dawson
 1. *The Voice of the Boy* (1902) talked about the male puberty voice breaking point.
 2. Believed that this breaking point was due to young boys singing in their upper voice without permitting the lower voice to develop.
 - E. Jerome Bates
 1. *Voice Culture for Children* (1907) emphasized proper breath management.
 - F. Frank R. Rix
 1. *Voice Training for School Children* (1910) emphasized breathing exercises and vocalizes.
 - G. Thaddeus P. Giddings
 1. *Grade School Music Teaching* (1919) declared proper breathing as the basis for good singing and should be taught from kindergarten on.
 2. He was a firm believer in early vocal training for children.
- V. A Misguided Philosophy
- A. Karl Gehrkens wrote *Music in the Grade School* (1934) and was the first to advocate shifting to an approach centered on song.

- B. Teachers became more concerned with the aesthetic experience for students through singing songs and less concerned with technique and vocal exercises.
 - C. Singing must be learned, and music teachers must be equipped for teaching kids to sing.
- VI. Advocates of Systematic Vocal Instruction
- A. Claude E. Johnson and Hollis Dann, author of the *Hollis Dann Song Series*, stressed vocal instruction for children.
 - B. William E. Ross wrote *Sing High, Sing Low*, for public school music educators, and regarded singing as an art and science.
 - C. P.W. Dykema and H.M. Cundiff recommended spending time on proper breathing exercises at the beginning of the music period, emphasizing importance of proper technique through singing phrases and lyrics.
- VII. The Reemergence of Systematic Vocal Instruction
- A. The 1980s saw the reemergence of systematic vocal instruction for school children in three main areas:
 1. Growing interest in children singing
 2. Influential publications and choral series emphasizing systematic vocal instruction
 3. Growing body of research on the effects on children's singing
 - B. Research on child and adolescent singing expanded in the 1990s and 2000s, with many authors and teachers developing choirs and gaining more knowledge.
- VIII. A Psychomotor Skill
- A. The Five Component Parts of the Method
 1. Some children develop naturally as singers, but most require some type of instruction to learn to sing well.
 2. Energize the Body, Breath, Ear, Voice, Song, used to develop the singing voice of all children.
 - B. When, Who, and How Long?
 1. Adult modeling of techniques should begin during infancy and continue throughout early childhood.
 2. Systematic vocal instruction should begin around age eight, preferably in a group setting.
 3. Vocal instruction should include all children.
 4. Systematic vocal instruction should not consume the entire class period.
 - C. The Select Choir
 1. Some elementary choirs divide students into the groups who can sing and will do well in the choir and those who cannot sing accurately or will not make the choir sound right.
 2. This is not good for all the students because some believe they are not good enough so they drop out.
 3. Allowing all students to sing and be involved in a choir that can train them to sing accurately can provide equal opportunities.

Discussion

This chapter stressed the importance of all children learning to sing, and the fact that all children be taught to sing. It explains the differences in the Song Approach and Systematic Vocal Instruction and how students learn under these methods. The Song Approach only focuses on students singing songs and no vocal exercises or techniques to better their singing. This poses a problem because many students do not learn to properly develop their singing voices, and sometimes give up on singing for this reason. The Systematic Vocal Instruction method emphasizes on energizing the body, breath, ear, voice, and song, to achieve the correct technique and results for students. I believe a combination of both of these methods will provide students with the most well rounded form of music education. In teaching these methods together, students will learn musical content and correct technique for singing with systematic vocal instruction, as well as learn how to sing songs and the characteristics of the performing songs with the song approach. Teachers of music education today are moving back to older philosophies of instruction and applying these ways into their classrooms to develop their students' singing voices and proper technique.