

Teaching Singing to Children and Young Adults

Jenevora Williams

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Foreword

It is a great pleasure to have the opportunity to provide a foreword to Jenevora Williams' book *Teaching Singing to Children and Young Adults*. The text represents the culmination of years of successful practice, allied to recent systematic research, into key aspects of how singing develops from childhood through adolescence and into early adulthood. An accomplished singer and teacher, Jenevora builds on her extensive craft knowledge and doctoral-level research to provide an evidence-based account of how we can best foster singing development by ensuring that pedagogical practice is closely linked to the physical nature of the vocal instrument. This is an interdisciplinary approach that offers a teacher-friendly synthesis in an engaging and enlightened narrative with helpful (and often amusing) illustrations and case studies. It is always a challenge to capture the process of singing teaching in written form because of its moment-to-moment interweaving of action, response and interpretation. Jenevora is to be commended for providing us with a multi-level account of how we can ensure that successful singing is not the province of a privileged minority, but open to all if we adopt appropriate teaching strategies.

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About the author

This book has arisen out of my personal fascination with people: how their voices work, how to get them to work at their optimum, why they sometimes don't work as well as they could, how they develop throughout the lifespan and how the personality of the singer is at the core of the whole process. I was a professional solo singer for many years, working in opera, oratorio and recitals. I had always taught alongside performing and gradually my interest in teaching overtook that of performing. After ten years of a busy touring performance schedule, I shifted the balance towards teaching and have found it endlessly fascinating and rewarding.

As a singing teacher, I work with people of all ages and abilities. I teach professional adult singers, pupils who are training to be professionals and amateur singers. I teach classical, musical theatre and pop. As well as dealing with healthy voices, I do specific rehabilitation work with singers from the hospital voice clinic: these individuals come under all of the categories mentioned above. I also teach children and have done so for over 20 years. I have been extremely fortunate to have taught in a variety of excellent institutions: music conservatoires, specialist music schools, theatre schools, cathedral choir schools, state schools and independent schools. Working with such a diverse group of pupils has been a real privilege and has given me many opportunities to think about the teaching process. In addition to practical teaching work I have been involved in voice research. This means working with laryngologists, acousticians, electrical engineers, anatomists, speech therapists, statisticians and educational theorists, all of them experts in their fields and all fascinated by voices.

Prelude: questioning the assumptions

'It is a mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.' Aristotle

Humans are resourceful and curious. When presented with evidence we will make assumptions about cause and effect. If this evidence is limited, the assumptions may be flawed. Think of the Black Death travelling from China, through Europe and into Britain in the fourteenth century. Initially it was believed that this was due to the conjunction of three planets in 1345, causing 'great pestilence in the air'. Many years later, a link between the presence of rats and the disease was established, suggesting that rats were responsible. Later, further evidence linked the disease to the fleas that lived on the rats. Recent research has concluded that the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* was present in the fleas, which were carried by the rats. The recent researchers are no more intelligent than the astronomers of the fourteenth century; they merely have more evidence on which to base their conclusions.

The voice is inside the body; we can't see much of what is happening, so teachers have tended to base their methods on how it feels. Teaching anyone to sing has always been a subjective process: intelligent and curious teachers have devised methods and theories founded on their experience. This approach has, of course, produced fantastic singers, despite the limited evidence base. Perhaps a re-evaluation of singing pedagogy, with the advantage of more information, would help some of the singers who develop problems with their voices, or those who are just less able than others. Nowadays teachers can't use ignorance as an excuse; we can draw on a huge range of knowledge. With modern techniques of voice analysis and internal observation we can begin to understand more about how we sing. The science of x-rays, MRI scanning, spectral and waveform analysis, electroglottograms and laryngoscopy have contributed to our knowledge of vocal function. Scientific evidence can illuminate much of our accepted

teaching practice, so that we are able to separate out the more useful and effective traditional voice training methods. Of course, this is all work in progress. Research and the pursuit of knowledge and understanding have not stopped yet, and never will do. There is still much that we don't know about voices and how they work. Our current understanding is merely based on the evidence we have here and now.

This book seeks to question every aspect of children's voices and methods of teaching singing that we may have assumed to be correct. If they can stand up to scrutiny in the light of the most recent evidence, then they are the best we can have for the moment.

There are many commonly held beliefs that may not withstand this reassessment. Here are some examples of widely accepted ideas that are being challenged.

1 *'Babies can cry for hours and their voices don't get tired – surely we could learn from them?'*

Babies have a completely different vocal set-up from children and adults. Their needs are specific to them and so the function of the voice isn't really comparable. Their prime concern for survival is to make noise to attract attention (short, loud, but not necessarily varied) and to feed efficiently (large quantities in little time); their vocal set-up fulfils this need excellently. Children and adults have developed the ability to form a huge variety of vocal sounds, enabling speech. Sustained speech (and singing) is helped by having larger lungs; these are needed for activities such as running. Infants have smaller lungs, and a larynx with different proportions, sitting higher in the throat. Young children have a vocal system that is part way between the infant and the adult model. Understanding this can help us to see why children's voices are not like mini-adult voices (p. 25).

2 *'Sing from your diaphragm'*

The diaphragm can neither be seen nor felt either internally or externally. Furthermore, it is working when we inhale, not when we make sound. This implies that any mention of the diaphragm is of little use for singing, the muscles we are consciously using for breathing are mostly abdominal ones (pp. 84–87).

3 *'Warming up should start with stretching exercises'*

Sports science suggests that it can be damaging to stretch cold muscles. For the singer, stretching includes singing sustained high notes as well

as overall body stretches. An effective warm-up needs to work the body gently in order to increase blood flow to the muscles; it also raises the muscle temperature, enabling better metabolic function. Overall body movements such as jogging or dancing are the best way to prepare muscles for action; this can be followed by gentle breathing and vocal exercises (pp. 131–133).

4 *‘Place the sound in the resonators at the front of the face (in the mask)’*

The sound is made in the larynx and comes out through the mouth. It only goes into the nasal cavities if you sing with a nasal quality (usually reserved for nasal consonants, French nasal vowels or dramatic characterisation). The singer may feel a sensation of vibrations in the front of the face, if this happens when the voice is working well, then it can be a useful reminder to the singer. If the singer feels no particular sensation here it is simply because there are no special cavities in the skull for aiding vocal resonance (pp. 107–109).

5 *‘Children shouldn’t be taught singing technique, it may damage their voices’*

Learning a technique for any physical skill is merely discovering how to do the task with the least effort. If technique is taught at the right level for the individual, it will make singing easier and more enjoyable for her. It is rare for singing to cause pathological damage to the voice. The more common problem for singers is entrenched bad habits, which can remain throughout life. These bad habits can arise from either poor tuition, or just from a lack of guidance. For example, it’s very unlikely that a singer will acquire good breathing technique without some help from a teacher. If the child is taught skills from a young age, they will be able to enjoy singing to the best of their ability (pp. 7–12).

6 *‘Singing is best done with an open throat, a yawning sensation may help’*

The throat is a very versatile squeeze tube. The wrong constrictions will limit flexibility, add unnecessary tension and may result in a less-pleasant sound. The right constrictions allow us to form all of our vowels and consonants, as well as the exciting upper partials in the sound. The secret is, of course, to know the difference between them. A yawning action will lift the soft palate (good) and depress the back of the tongue (not good), pushing it down onto the top of the larynx. This reduces the mobility of the larynx and can result in a hooty sound. It can also limit the release of the jaw and rise of the soft palate. Any tongue tension will prevent clear articulation of vowels and consonants (pp. 106–107).

7 *'Sing badly and you'll get nodules'*

Vocal fold nodules rarely have a single cause, they tend to occur as a result of a combination of factors: the most common of which is anxiety, the most unlikely is bad singing technique. They can occur as a result of poor voice use in other contexts such as sport or unsupervised singing. Of all vocal fold pathologies, nodules are relatively easy to treat (p. 160).

8 *'Boys and girls have different voices'*

You may think that, in general, girls are better at singing. It has also been said that the sound of a high-quality boys' choir cannot be matched by that of a girls' choir. Research has shown that even experts couldn't tell the difference between the two [2]. Once children's voices are trained, there is no difference between girls and boys until they reach puberty. The differences in untrained voices are cultural, not physical (pp. 13–15).

9 *'Children shouldn't sing difficult songs, their voices can't manage it'*

All voices have limitations, regardless of age or sex. There are some difficult songs that can be sung by certain children, and some that can't. To simplify the classification, we can look at what makes a vocal task difficult. Because of the way in which the larynx works, anything that is high, loud, fast or long can be considered as a vocal extreme. By looking in more detail at voices at each stage of development, we can understand both the potential and the limits of the voice. With this knowledge we are better placed to decide what can be learnt and what can't (p.30, 49, 60 and 64).

10 *'Cathedral choristers are more likely to get voice problems'*

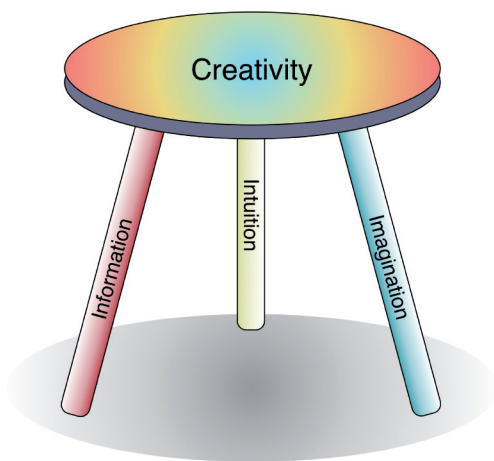
One would imagine that this is quite likely: these children are performing to high professional standards every day. This places them under high levels of vocal and emotional pressure. My own PhD research into choristers' vocal health showed that the opposite was in fact true, the choristers had healthier voices than any other group of children whom I assessed. It is likely that children under pressure can adapt: they develop strategies to limit the impact of the activity and preserve their singing voices (pp. 162–166).

These are just a few of the myths to be reinterpreted; there are many other examples of misperceptions in the way in which singing has been taught in the past. If we question these methods, this can make teachers uncomfortable. We all seek security in our belief systems; when these are

challenged, emotions can run high. What we will actually find is that all of these ideas have arisen with the best possible intentions; the problems occur when they are misinterpreted.

The role of the singing teacher

Singing is only meaningful to the listener when the imagination is alight. Singing teachers have always used imagery to communicate ideas to the pupil and this is an excellent way to teach. In addition to a vivid imagination, however, the teacher needs to *really* understand what is happening vocally in the pupil. Imagination and intuition alone are not enough. The overall role of the singing teacher is as a facilitator: the teacher is using a combination of his or her skills in order to support a creative outcome. It may help to think of the teacher as having three equally important facets: **Intuition**, **Imagination** and **Information**. These legs of the three-legged stool are supporting the central act of **Creativity**.



How can a book tell anyone how to teach? Surely the skill of teaching can't be described in words? The skilled singing teacher combines practical experience gained from both teaching and performing with an intellectual knowledge of how voices develop and function. In common with all teachers you will need communication skills, empathy, a curiosity driving you to keep learning, personal organisation and, above all, enthusiasm. It's always risky trying to communicate the essence of good

teaching with a book. There is already plenty of published scientific evidence on physical development, vocal technique, stages of learning and vocal health. This book does not prescribe a teaching method; it is a summary of relevant, research-based information that has been tried and tested in the teaching studio. If you like, it is providing more for the 'information' leg of the three-legged, creativity stool. The other two legs can be strengthened from other sources. My aim is to act as a catalyst to stimulate ideas, whether you are new to teaching singing, or have been doing it for years.



New to teaching?

Teachers who have trained primarily as keyboard players, conductors or classroom teachers often coach young singers. Despite their own extensive experience of working with children, these teachers may not themselves have sung at an advanced level. They may not have much knowledge of how voices work or of children's vocal development. Having said that, there are numerous inspiring and effective teachers who base their practice largely on intuition which is, as we have seen, an essential ingredient in a good teacher. I am hoping that this book may provide some additional information to enhance the knowledge and practice of experienced teachers, as well as inspiring newer teachers.

Many people will have had their learning environment clouded by a culture of fear, failure and guilt. This may come from within the individual, from those in their peer group, or from teachers. Pupils will generally undervalue their ability: they may cover their insecurity with a veneer of confidence and ambition, but this is often only superficial. Singers need kind, empathetic nurturing during their training and throughout their performing life. They need permission to fail: making mistakes and learning from them takes courage, and it can only take place if the pupil feels safe to do so. If lessons are seen as places for serious play, you and the pupil can enjoy the act of exploration. The teacher can create space for the singer to grow, suggesting goals without shattering dreams.

It can help if boys and girls sing in separate choirs between the ages of about 8 and 15. Beyond this age, the boys will be developing their adult vocal range and will not be in any sort of competition or comparison with the girls.

Chapter 1 Summary

- It is likely that singing evolved before speech.
- When learning to sing, we are working on four main skill areas, communication, musicianship, technique and repertoire.
- Singing has been shown to increase feelings of well-being and to improve self-esteem and social skills.
- Participating in musical activities can improve literacy and numeracy skills, the acquisition of fine motor skills and memorisation abilities.
- Learning a singing technique, at any age, not only can enhance performance but also can reduce the risk of vocal strain. Learning technique is making it easier.
- Boys' and girls' voices (pre-puberty) do not differ noticeably in structure although they may use their voices differently.
- The gender of trained children's singing voices cannot be distinguished with any accuracy.
- Boys tend to lag behind girls, both in their ability to sing in tune and in their enthusiasm for singing.
- It is important to give boys the right motivation to sing.

Chapter 2 Summary

Musical experience of the infant and young child:

- Musical experiences begin prenatally for the unborn baby.
- The sounds are associated with the hormonal input from the mother, whether these are threatening or pleasurable.
- ‘Motherese’ is often close to singing, babies learn to associate music with both calming and stimulating messages.
- The infant brain is very adaptable, this helps with the acquisition of speech.
- All children use singing, or non-speech vocalising as part of their play.
- Musical activities for the very young can help their educational development.

Vocal structure of the infant:

- The infant has smaller lungs (to enable more space for digesting food).
- The infant has a higher larynx (to limit choking and aid rapid feeding).
- The infant has a less mobile larynx (more effective as a valve, less effective for vocal variety).
- Infant vocal structure is based on the survival requirements for crying and feeding.
- Child and adult vocal structure is based on the requirements of speaking and running.

Establishing good habits for singing:

- Encourage good posture, tall and loose.
- Play with extending the pitch range.
- Encourage in-tune singing by using melodic fragments as well as whole songs.
- Young children have a higher pitch range than older children and women.
- Involve parents with singing activities as much as possible.

Chapter 3 Summary

- Singing is an integral part of play.
- Play songs can be sophisticated and complex.
- At this age the child can learn more specific physical skills, breathing technique, extending upper pitch range and exploring different voice qualities.
- Participation and play are more effective than instruction.
- The involvement of parents is advantageous.

Musical development:

- Children have an innate sense of audiovisual mapping for music notation, this can become confused by ambiguous instructions.
- Learn musicianship holistically: combine aural, visual and kineasthetic. In other words, singing involves listening and reading notation as well as performing.
- Boys lag behind girls with singing in tune and also with their self-perception as singers. Regular singing can improve both aspects.

Singing abilities:

- Pitch range tends to be fixed at the lower end and extendable at the upper end. Range may be limited due to the size of the larynx.
- Loudness is limited also by the size and proportions of the larynx.
- Vocal stamina is not as strong as in older children, this age group will need more frequent breaks and less vocally demanding repertoire.

Chapter 4 Summary

- Musical tastes developed in adolescence shape individuals' identity and their choice of social groups.
- Adolescents engage with music in some form for an average of 2.5 hours a day.
- The onset of puberty may be slightly earlier than it was 50 years ago. There is no conclusive evidence to show why this may be so.

Adolescent girls:

- The larynx grows by about 34%.
- Growth patterns can result in temporary breathiness or roughness in the voice.
- The onset of the menstrual cycle can also result in periodic roughness in the voice.
- Singing high notes is an unusual sensation, encouragement, exploration and positive role models will help a girl to use this part of her range.

Adolescent boys:

- The larynx grows by about 65%.
- This extreme growth will have had an evolutionary advantage.
- Growth patterns are in five noticeable stages relating to both overall physical growth and the growth of the larynx.
- The speaking pitch is the most reliable indicator of the stage of voice change.
- The high pitch range may continue to be easily accessible after the speaking pitch has lowered. It is advisable to use this part of the voice only occasionally during voice change.
- The comfortable pitch range may reduce considerably, careful choice of repertoire is needed.
- Most boys are happy to accept voice change and enjoy using their new voice.
- Instances where boys are reluctant to acknowledge voice change need to be dealt with sensitively.

Teaching singing technique:

- The same limitations to pitch, loudness and stamina will apply to both teenage girls and boys.
- Boys may have a significantly reduced pitch range (to less than an octave).
- Both boys and girls may adopt compensatory habits to cope with vocal difficulties if they are not given helpful guidance. These habits can remain into their adult singing if they are not addressed.

Changes to the approach to boys' singing over the last 100 years:

- Boys used to be kept singing in the soprano range until their voices were unable to sustain the strain. This resulted not only in a catastrophic collapse (breaking) but also jeopardised their future singing for some time.
- The advice now is to sing in the lowest comfortable range and to use falsetto singing only occasionally.
- If young men feel more comfortable singing in the alto range, this is best developed *after* a year or two of using the baritone range.

Allocation of choral parts:

- It is often necessary to ask singers to join a part less suited to their vocal range.
- It is not intrinsically harmful to a soprano's voice if she is asked to sing alto.
- It is rare to find a teenage boy with a developed tenor range, most tenors of this age will be Stage III boys with a lowering range, or proto-tenors using falsetto for high notes.

The presence of parents in singing lessons may not be helpful for this age group.

Chapter 5 Summary

Posture:

- Good posture requires balance, a state of alert poise, where the head is directed up.
- Bad habits may involve pulling the head forward or pulling the chin up.
- Good alignment is a direction, not a position.

Breathing:

- Effective breathing uses the lower abdominal muscles.
- Feel them moving in gradually as you sing and then releasing for the air to fall into the body.
- Use hissing and buzzing exercises to feel the movement of these muscles.
- Feel the response of the muscles in the waist, they will engage as you breathe out.
- The back muscles may be used in young adult singers, but only for occasional vocal extremes.
- The singer will not be aware of any work in the diaphragm during singing.

The larynx:

- The larynx is primarily a valve, it is very good at lifting and squeezing shut.
- It contains the vocal folds, when these vibrate they are the source of the sound.
- Pitch is determined by the length and tension in the vocal folds.
- Loudness is determined by the force of collision of the vocal folds.
- Vocal timbre and voice register can be determined by the thickness of the vocal folds. Speech quality, in the lower pitch range, is made with thicker vocal folds.
- Vibrato is a natural phenomenon that can be heard in adolescent and young adult voices. All voices are capable of making a wobble that may sound similar to vibrato.
- The larynx will have a tendency to constrict, this can be heard as a degree of harshness in the sound.

- There are four types of onset: aspirate, glottal, simultaneous or creak. The first three are all commonly used in many styles of singing.
- Breathiness is caused by air escaping between the vocal folds. It can be as a result of poor coordination of the laryngeal muscles, slight inflammation of the vocal folds or just as a result of bad habits.
- Belting is an extreme vocal gesture. It is only to be used sparingly and must be taught carefully.

The vocal tract:

- The length of the vocal tract is determined by the height of the larynx and the position of the lips.
- The soft palate must be raised if the sound is not to be nasal.
- Yawning and swallowing are frequent habitual actions that conflict with good singing.
- The pharynx is a squeeze tube: the constrictions and openings along its length give the sound its qualities, including all the vowels and consonants.
- The tongue needs to be flexible in order to articulate text clearly, the tongue root must not be tense or pressed onto the larynx.
- The jaw needs to be released but not over-opened.
- Projected resonance may feel like vibrations across the front of the face or the roof of the mouth.
- Vowels are made by the position of the tongue and, to some extent, the lips.
- Problems with consonants can nearly always be addressed with the right approach, this may be from a qualified speech therapist.
- The expressions of the face should be as a direct consequence of the emotions of the song, we don't want to see technique in the face.

Different musical styles:

- Children may want to sing music from a variety of styles.
- Most CCM singing is based on speech, taking speech quality to higher pitches and using a speech-style articulation of text.

Chapter 6 Summary

Individual lesson structure:

- The initial conversation is a useful way to establish the pupil's vocal and emotional health.
- A good singing lesson will:
 - follow a basic structure: warm-up, exercises, repertoire
 - include sight-reading, theory and aural training: these can be integrated into the other elements of the lesson most of the time
 - integrate the body, mind and voice: physical embodiment of the singing process linked with imagination, understanding and communication
 - present one or at most two new ideas on which to work: communicate this clearly to the pupil so that they know how to practise it
 - send the pupil away in better voice than at the start (the speaking voice will be clearer and brighter) and in a more positive frame of mind. Pupils have to know that singing (and this includes practice at home) will make them feel better in themselves.
- Physical and emotional empathy is a useful way to understand your pupil's singing:
 - be careful not to pick up on unnecessary tension
 - remember to show good body use by example.
 - Use of touch in lessons can be valuable if it is managed sensibly.
 - Audio or video recordings of lessons is very helpful.

Athletes' training principles applied to singing:

- Know which muscles are already warmed-up (some of the postural muscles, also those used in speech).
- Be aware of those that need to be started 'from cold'.
- Training must be specific to the current repertoire.
- In order to increase stamina, the system can be overloaded (within reason).
- Train progressively by gradually increasing the workload.
- Balance hard and easy training.
- Vary the training.
- Train regularly.
- Rest effectively, resting the voice by engaging with another activity is better than just passive resting.

A suggested order for warming-up:

- **Set up your mind** – focus, no distractions.
- **Wake up the body** – running, dancing, brisk walk, run up stairs, arm circling.
- **Align your body** – posture work, Alexander Technique.
- **Specific flexibility exercises**, allowing muscles to lengthen – breathing, vocal glides.
- **Small and gentle movements leading on to extended movements** – e.g. small glides – large glides – multiple large glides, slow scales – fast scales, small pitch range – large pitch range, quiet singing – louder singing.
- **Varied and progressive exercises throughout.**

Personal practice:

- Effective practice is essential if progress is to be made.
- Practice must be regular, systematic and structured.
- Goals should be clear from the outset.
- Know when to stop: shorter more frequent practice sessions will be more effective.

Memorisation:

- Songs performed from memory will be sung with a deeper understanding and communicated more effectively.
- Memorising is time-consuming and can be frustrating for everyone.
- Give memorising your full attention, involve all your senses at the same time.
- Use varied strategies: aural, kinaesthetic and visual memories work better when linked with each other in the imagination.
- Memorise only short sections of a song at a time.
- Repeat the section at least three times, both out loud and in your head, before moving on.
- Have an overview of the song: this can be the different verses, the overall story or the harmonic structure. The overview can be a visual ‘map’ in your head.
- Vary the order in which you memorise sections of music: don’t always start at the beginning.

- Be aware of how you use your voice at all times, not just when you are singing.
- You are more likely to get ill or use your voice less effectively if you are stressed or worried: chill out!
- Sleep is the best cure for many problems.

Chapter 7 Summary

- We take vocal health for granted until it goes wrong.
- Voice disorders are surprisingly common in children.
- Vocal problems are rarely due to a single cause, they normally arise from a combination of factors.
- Singing habits are rarely the cause but the problem may be most apparent when singing.
- A voice problem is generally nobody's fault. Reassure the singer and remove any sense of guilt or blame.
- Prevention is better than cure.
- Effective prevention requires awareness of voice use at all times.

Vocal loading, or impact on the voice, is increased by:

- Amount of use (number of minutes or hours per day).
- Level of use (loudness).
- Emotional stress (affecting muscle function).

Strategies for good voice use:

- Coping with emotional stress, use breathing strategies such as counting for longer when you breathe out than when you breathe in.
- Avoid using the voice while exerting the body.
- Be aware of dust and pollen levels.
- Try to dampen boomy acoustics and use reflectors in dry acoustics.
- Pace the voice – take frequent voice rests.
- Keep swallowing, this disperses excess mucus and lubricates the vocal folds.
- Use amplification if necessary or use hands as a megaphone.
- Avoid speaking in noisy environments.

- Explore different voice qualities, establish a more gentle neutral voice.
- Avoid excess coughing or throat clearing.

Eating and drinking:

- Keep hydrated by drinking enough water.
- Caffeine and alcohol will dehydrate the body.
- Dairy products may cause temporary mucus production; this will disperse in 20–30 minutes.
- Lozenges are mainly useful as a placebo.
- Avoid eating late at night.
- Be aware of any medications which may cause dehydration or irritation of the larynx.

Voice disorders:

- Voice disorders can be organic (not related to voice use) or functional (related to voice use).
- The most common factor in the causes of voice disorders is high anxiety levels.

Performance anxiety or stage fright:

- Stage fright is a natural physical response to fear.
- A controlled level of anxiety will enhance performance.
- If the level of physiological arousal (e.g. heart-rate) and the level of cognitive anxiety are both beyond a certain level, the result is a catastrophic reduction in performance outcome.
- Focusing attention on breathing patterns can help to reduce anxiety.
- A confident performance is more likely if you are well-prepared.

If the voice goes wrong:

- Rest.
- Steam.
- Sleep.
- If problems persist for more than three weeks, visit a doctor.

Chapter 8 Summary

General guidance for inclusive teaching:

- Any group of children will have individuals with particular educational or physical needs.
- Labels applied to these children can be useful servants but poor masters.
- Try to establish links with the school teachers and parents, and discuss suitable methods of learning directly with the child.
- The issues discussed in the chapter can occur in varying degrees in each individual, they are often complex and multiple.
- Make a baseline assessment of every child.
- Give realistic encouragement and believable feedback.
- Encourage multi-sensory learning using kinaesthetic (physical feeling), aural and visual stimuli.
- Introduce new ideas incrementally.
- Avoid distractions in the room, either strong smells or visual clutter.
- Give a clear practice structure.
- Keep written music notation simple.

Postlude

Having read this book, you will, I hope be encouraged in your teaching practice to seek out further study of the subject. Research shows that teachers with qualifications, both those who have undergone teacher training and those who partake in continuing professional development schemes, all teach better on average than their untrained colleagues. The most effective learning environment for children is one staffed by highly qualified and motivated teachers, providing a context for children to play and share initiatives, and where pupils are encouraged to be part of the learning experience.

The very fact that you are reading a book on teaching suggests that you are open to learning and are prepared to try out new ideas. Have the courage to step outside your comfortable habitual methods and try some new repertoire, or use a new exercise.

It is also essential, as a teacher, to know one's limitations. Sometimes the relationship with a pupil just doesn't work out and it is important to recognise this and to be able to guide the pupil towards another, more suitable teacher. Also, no one can know everything. Your limitation may be a lack of knowledge of jazz improvisation, suitable operatic roles for a tenor in his early thirties, pop repertoire, fun songs for the under-5s or how to teach singers with basic pitch-matching problems. That is not a problem at all if you know where to refer the pupil to fill in any gaps. Give and take between teachers is far more common than it used to be, you don't need to 'possess' a pupil. Hopefully the pupil is coming to you voluntarily and can benefit from input from other teachers too.

As I said at the beginning, a book cannot tell you how to teach and a book cannot tell you how to sing. In order to try to present information rather than instruction, I have focused much of the text on the detailed mechanics of singing. Singing is a whole body-mind experience. It relies on imagination and instinct. A performance without inspiration is a poor experience for all concerned. Teaching likewise depends on intuition, empathy and imagination.



You don't need to
'possess' a student...

Educating people is of such importance, it must be seen as a serious undertaking. On the other hand, the process of teaching can be playful and creative. Remember that humans are curious and resourceful. Using the evidence you have, try things out, invent your own exercises. If they don't work, try again. If they do work, share them.

'The principal goal of education is to create individuals who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done – people who are creative, innovative and discoverers.' Jean Piaget

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