Vocal Development in Young Children

Presented by
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First Steps in Music for Preschool and Beyond
by John Feierabend
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Singing is the instinctive language of the child.

—Zoltán Kodaly
Singing Games (1937)

Singing is the foundation of children’s musical development.
Singing in tune is a learned behavior that almost all children can accomplish.
Just as children develop language by hearing and imitating speech patterns,
they learn to match pitch and sing in tune by hearing and imitating musical patterns.

—OAKE Home/Membership Page

Tuneful singing is the marriage of tuneful thinking and physiological awareness. The child must be able to first “catch the tune” and then reproduce it in head voice. Young children must be given opportunities to experience and develop both of these important skills.

Once they are able to do this, they will be on their way to a lifetime of tuneful singing. The window of opportunity for the development of this lifelong gift is in early childhood, kindergarten, and first grade. We must start at the beginning with vocal development. We must help children explore the sensation of singing and then give them guided opportunities to reproduce the sound. However, to engage this age group, we must use techniques and strategies that are developmentally appropriate while remaining wonderfully childlike, playful, imaginary, and fun.

**Points to Remember**

1. Sing for the class, not with the class.
2. Most learning takes place when a child sings by him or herself.
3. A child learns best from another child model.
4. Develop vocal proficiency before instrumental application.
5. Move from group to independence in all activities.
7. Balance beat groups in twos and beat groups in threes.
8. Provide experiences in major, minor, and modal tonalities.
First Steps in Music

An 8-Part Music Readiness Curriculum
For 3-8 Year Old Children

Singing/Tonal Activity Categories

1. Pitch Exploration/Vocal Warm-up (Discovering the sensation of the singing voice)
   • Vocal glissandos

2. Fragment Singing (Developing independent singing)
   • Echo Songs
   • Call and Response Songs

3. Simple Songs (Developing independent singing and musical syntax)
   • 3-4 Note Songs
   • Expanded Range

4. Arioso (Developing original musical thinking)
   • Spontaneous created songs by the child

5. SongTales (Developing expressive sensitivity through listening)
   • Ballads for children

Movement Activities Categories

6. Movement Exploration/Warm-up
   (Developing expressive sensitivity through movement)
   • Movement with and without classical music accompaniment

7. Movement for Form and Expression
   (Singing/speaking and moving with formal structure and expression)
   • Non-Locomotor (finger plays, action songs, circle games, with recorded music)
   • Locomotor (circle games, with recorded music)

8. Beat Motion Activities
   (Developing competencies in maintaining the beat in groups of 2 and 3)
   • Child-Initiated Beat Motions
     • Non-Locomotor
     • Locomotor
   • Teacher-Initiated Beat Motions
     • Non-Locomotor
     • Locomotor

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1. Pitch Exploration / Vocal Warm-up
(discovering the sensation of the singing voice)

- **Pipe cleaners**
- **Whistles**
  Slide • Siren
- **Puppets**
  Ghost • Cow • Whale
- **Drawings**
  Pathway Cards • Yarn Shapes • Rollercoaster
- **Poems**
  Two Little Puppets • Grandma’s Glasses
- **Stories**
  Pitch Exploration Stories
- **Books**
  *Georgie the Ghost*, Robert Bright
  *Oops*, David Shannon
  *Gobble Growl Grunt*, Peter Spier
  *Mama Don’t Allow*, Thacher Hurd
- **Songs**
  Little Red Caboose • Alley Galoo Galoo
- **Games**
  Bean Bag • Toss Across • Popcorn Zipper
  Elevator • Magic Crayon

**Fluidity ~ Expression ~ Flexibility ~ Inflection**
**Cowboy Joe**

Cowboy Joe was a bold young man,
He dreamed of rustling cattle, most of all.
He wanted to see if the cows would come
When he let out his cowboy call.

*Yee-haa*

He practiced all day from morning to night,
And he practiced both summer and fall.
He knew some day he'd have his chance
To try out his cowboy call.

*Yee-haa*

Well, finally one day, it was proudly announced
That his ma and pa and all,
Were takin' a trip to his grandfather's ranch
Where he could try out his cowboy call.

*Yee-haa*

He jumped for joy and grabbed his gear
And he ran back down the hall.
He hopped into the car and was ready to go
To let out his cowboy call.

*Yee-haa*

When he arrived at the ranch he was happy to see
That the cows were not in the stall.
He dashed to the field where they quietly grazed
And he let out his cowboy call.

*Yee-haa*

Well they all did come right up to the fence
And he sure felt ten feet tall.
"I'm Cowboy Joe. See how the cows come
When I let out my cowboy call."

*Yee-haa*

Now, that was really some day for Cowboy Joe
And he sure did have a ball.
Now he's wantin' to try bigger and better things;
So he's practicing his elephant call.

(?)

— John M. Feierabend
2. **Fragment Singing**
   (developing independent singing)

**Echo Songs**
- Bill Grogan’s Goat
- Charlie Over the Ocean
- Down by the Bay
- I Met a Bear
- Johnny on the Woodpile
- Kye Kye Kule
- My Aunt Came Back
- No More Pie
- Oh, In the Woods
- Purple Light
- Wise Old Owl

**Call-and-Response Songs**
- Did You Feed My Cow?
- Hill and Gully Rider
- John Kanaka
- John the Rabbit
- Little Girl, Little Boy
- Miss Julie Ann Johnson
- Sea Lion
- The Telephone
Fragment Singing

Echo Song

Charlie Over the Ocean

Leader: Group:

Charlie over the ocean, Charlie over the ocean,

Charlie over the sea, Charlie over the sea.

Charlie caught a big fish, Charlie caught a big fish,

Can’t catch me, Can’t catch me.

Did You Feed My Cow?

Leader: Group:

Well, did you feed my cow! Yes, ma’am.

Well, did you feed my cow? Yes, ma’am.

What did you feed her? Corn and hay.

What did you feed her? Corn and hay.

Additional Verses & Motions

Verse 2
Did you milk her good? Yes, ma’am.
Did you milk her like you should?
Yes, ma’am.
How did you milk her? Squish, squish, squish.
(Imitate milking motions with hands.)
How did you milk her? Squish, squish, squish.

Verse 3
Did my cow get sick? Yes ma’am.
Was she covered with ticks? Yes ma’am.
How did she die? Min Min Min.
(Shake head back and forth.)
How did she die? Min Min Min.

Verse 4
Did the buzzards come? Yes ma’am.
Did the buzzards come? Yes ma’am.
How did they come? Flap, flap, flap.
(With hands under arms, imitate wings flapping.)
How did they come? Flap, flap, flap.

Call-and-Response Song
3. Simple Songs
(developing independent singing and musical syntax)

3–4 Note Songs
Frog in the Meadow
Hot Cross Buns
Johnny Had One Friend
Pitter Patter

Expanded Range
Bow Belinda
I Can Hammer
Lazy Bones
Muffin Man
Mulberry Bush
4. *Arioso*

(developing original musical thinking)

**Strategies for Arioso**

- **Create without words**
  - Conversations with neutral syllables
  - Kazoo
  - Humming

- **Create with familiar text**
  - Nursery rhymes
  - Known poems, stories
  - Jump rope rhymes

- **Create text and melody**
  - Conversations
  - Whole songs

**Arioso Ideas**

- What I Had for Breakfast
- What I Did on Vacation
- Sing Me a Story
- *I See a Song*, Eric Carle
- Take It
- Pictures / Books
  - Younger children: “Sing me what you see.”
  - Older children: “Sing me the story.”

**Note:**
An autoharp will help stabilize tonality.
5. SongTales
(developing expressive sensitivity through listening)

Ballads for Children

All the Pretty Little Horses (Linda Saport)
Father Grumble (adapted by John Feierabend)
Frog and Mouse (adapted by John Feierabend)
Mommy, Buy Me a China Doll (Harve and Margo Zemach)
Over in the Meadow (traditional)
Risseldy Rosseldy (traditional)
Shady Grove (traditional)
Tailor and the Mouse (adapted by John Feierabend)
The Crabfish (adapted by John Feierabend)
The Derby Ram (adapted by John Feierabend)
The Fox Went Out on a Chilly Night (Peter Spier)
The Riddle Song (traditional)
There Was a Man (adapted by John Feierabend)
Who Killed Cock Robin? (William Stobbs)

Experiences with pictures attached, even when they involve looking at picture books and learning new words, are not as valuable (as learning through the ears) because the child needs to learn sooner rather than later to go beyond just naming things that can be seen. Language that always comes with pictures attached will produce different brain organization than that which must be processed only through the ears.

Whatever the cause, studies have shown that early experience with careful, analytic listening can dramatically improve auditory processing, listening comprehension and, in turn, reading ability—even in children with an inherited weakness.

Unless the adult community decides to help us wrap these growing brains in the mental garments of language, reflection, and thought, I fear we will continue to see increasing numbers of children categorized as “educationally sick.”

—Jane Healy
Endangered Minds (1990)
The Tailor and the Mouse

There was a tailor had a mouse, Hi did-dle um-kum feedle. They lived together in a house, Hi did-dle um-kum feedle. Hi did-dle um-kum, tarum, tantum, through the house of Ramsey, Hi did-dle um-kum o-ver the lea, Hi did-dle um-kum feedle.

**Verse 2**
The tailor thought the mouse was ill, Hi diddle umkum feedle. Because he took an awful chill, Hi diddle umkum feedle.

(Chorus)

**Verse 3**
The tailor thought the mouse would die.... And so he baked him in a pie....

(Chorus)

**Verse 4**
He cut the pie, the mouse ran out.... The mouse was in a terrible pout....

(Chorus)

**Verse 5**
The tailor gave him catnip tea.... Until a healthy mouse was he....

(Chorus)
Ask Me
(about my echo song)

Leader
Charlie over the ocean,
Charlie over the sea,
Charlie caught a **big fish**, Can’t catch me.

Echo
Charlie over the ocean,
Charlie over the sea,
Charlie caught a **big fish**, Can’t catch me.

Child A skips around the outside of the circle and sings the Leader part. Class echoes each line. On “me,” Child A gently taps the person closest to them (Child B) who then being skipping around the circle trying to catch up to Child A. Child A keeps skipping until he/she arrives at the empty spot left by Child B. Child B becomes the new leader.

**Verbal Linguistic, Naturalist, Visual Spatial Connection**
Ask the children to name as many animals as they can that live in the ocean or the sea; then substitute that animal instead of **big fish** (Charlie caught a hermit crab... or Charlie caught a jelly fish...). Have the children draw those creatures. They came up with an ocean full of sea creatures.

Ask Me
(about my counting song)

Johnny had **one** friend, **One** friend, **one** friend,
Johnny had **one** friend, Johnny had **two**.

Johnny had **two** friends... **three**.

Johnny had **three** friends... **four**.

Johnny had **four** friends... **five**.

Johnny had **one** friend, **One** friend, **one** friend,
Johnny had **one** friend, Johnny had **two**. make a flat bed with one hand, tap on it with one finger of the other hand
hold up two fingers at end of verse

tap two fingers; hold up three
tap three fingers; hold up four
tap four fingers; hold up five
now switch hands
Available Resources

**Books for Preschool and Early Elementary**
- G-5880  First Steps in Music for Preschool and Beyond
- G-5276  The Book of Pitch Exploration
- G-5277  The Book of Echo Songs
- G-5278  The Book of Call and Response
- G-5280  The Book of Children’s Song Tales
- G-5876  The Book of Movement Exploration
- G-5877  The Book of Finger Plays and Action Songs
- G-5878  The Book of Beginning Circle Games
- G-5879  The Book of Songs and Rhymes with Beat Motions

**Recordings for Kids of All Ages**
by John M. Feierabend and Jill Trinka
- CD-645  There’s A Hole in the Bucket
- CD-646  Had a Little Rooster
- CD-647  Old Joe Clark
- CD-493  First Steps in Classical Music Keeping the Beat
- G-7001A Complete Curriculum Package
  Set of all books and recordings above
  *(Save over $40 with this offer!)*
- G-7001  Set of all four recordings above
  plus *First Steps in Music for Preschool and Beyond*

**Companion Materials**
- G-6400  Vocal Development Kit
  (Puppets, toys, and instruments with manual)
- G-6509  Pitch Exploration Stories
  (12 large picture cards)
- G-6510  Pitch Exploration Pathways
  (12 large picture cards)
- G-6511  Oh, In the Woods
  (12 large picture cards)
**Beautiful Song Tale Books**

- G-6535  The Crabfish
- G-7178  My Aunt Came Back
- G-7179  There Was a Man
- G-7416  Father Grumble
- G-7690  The Derby Ram

**Move It!**

- DVD-549  DVD, CD, and booklet

**Move It! 2**

- DVD-756  DVD, CD, and booklet

**Books for Infants and Toddlers**

- G-4974  First Steps in Music for Infants and Toddlers
- G-4975  The Book of Bounces
- G-4976  The Book of Wiggles and Tickles
- G-4977  The Book of Tapping and Clapping
- G-4978  The Book of Simple Songs and Circles
- G-4979  The Book of Lullabies
- G-5145  Set of 5 books above

**Recordings for Infants and Toddlers**

- CD-437  'Round and 'Round the Garden: Music in My First Year!
- CD-438  Ride Away on Your Horses: Music, Now I'm One!
- CD-439  Frog in the Meadow: Music, Now I'm Two!
- CD-493  First Steps in Classical Music: Keeping the Beat
- G-5483  Set of all four recordings above plus First Steps in Music for Infants and Toddlers

- VHS-499  Music and Early Childhood
  (30-minute documentary produced by Connecticut Public Television)
Conversational Solfege
Level 1:
G-5380  Teacher's Manual
G-5380FL Flashcards
G-5380S  Student Book
CD-526  Classical Selections CD

Level 2:
G-5381  Teacher's Manual
G-5381FL Flashcards
G-5381S  Student Book
CD-527  Classical Selections CD

Level 3:
G-5382  Teacher's Manual
G-5382S  Student Book
G-5547  The Book of Tunes for Beginning Sight-Readers

Books for Older Children
G-5279  The Book of Young Adult SongTales
G-5281  The Book of Canons

Lomax the Hound of Music
DVD and CD
DVD-829  The Best of Lomax the Hound of Music (2 hours)
CD-830  Lomax the Hound of Music: Favorite Songs (25 songs)

First Steps in Music Series
by John M. Feierabend

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John Feierabend

Dr. John Feierabend is considered one of the leading authorities on music and movement development in early childhood. He is a Professor of Music and Director of the Music Education Division at The Hartt School of the University of Hartford and is a past President of the Organization of American Kodály Educators. Dr. Feierabend makes frequent presentations both in the United States and abroad and is the author of over sixty books, articles, CDs, DVDs and videotapes.

A music educator for over thirty years, he continues to be committed to collecting, preserving and teaching the diverse folk music of our country and using that folk music as a bridge to help children understand and enjoy classical music. His books are a result of his belief that when many generations share common experiences such as traditional folk songs and rhymes, it helps them develop a valuable but dwindling commodity—a sense of community. When adults share child like memories with children they not only connect children with their ancestors, they enrich their children’s childhood and enable their children to some day tap into their own delicious childhood memories in order to share that same repertoire with their children.

Dr. Feierabend’s research has resulted in two music curricula: First Steps in Music, a music and movement program for infants through early elementary-aged children, and Conversational Solfege, a music literacy method for use in general music classes. He has been honored by the National Association for Music Education (MENC) as a Lowell Mason Vellow, received the Outstanding Educator Award from the Organization of American Kodály Educators (OAKE), and was the first American recipient of the international LEGO Prize, an award given annually to someone who has “helped to make the world a better place for children to live and grow.”

Lillie Feierabend

Lillie Feierabend is known for her work with young children and instilling a love of music within them. She has been a general music teacher in Connecticut for the past twenty years and a director for the Connecticut Children’s Chorus for the past twelve years. She received the 1998 Teacher of the Year Award from her district for her innovative and inclusive music programs. In 2008, she again received her district’s Teacher of the Year Award and the Outstanding Elementary Music Educators Award from the Connecticut Music Educators Association. She is a frequent clinician at local, state, and national conferences, speaking on many aspects of early childhood music.