

# SINGING WITH CHILDREN

Vocal Pedagogical Perspectives

Edited by  
Johann van der Sandt

**Ricerche**


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# **SINGING WITH CHILDREN**

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Johann van der Sandt



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# Prelude

by *Johann van der Sandt*

The second volume, *Singing with Children: Vocal Pedagogical Perspectives*, builds on the findings of its predecessor, *Singing with Children: International Perspectives*. This collection of academic essays allows scholars to deepen discussions, gain new insights and address topics not fully explored in the first volume. With the ever-evolving fields of music education, child development and pedagogy, this volume provides updated and integrated research on the importance of singing with children.

What characterises this publication is the diversity of the international authors who emphasise different approaches to music education in different cultures. Despite the considerable challenges we face globally, the practice of singing with children remains alive and well, and the book shows how singing can play a crucial role in closing the educational gaps left by the pandemic. Building on the solid foundation of the first volume and incorporating new perspectives, this publication offers a fuller understanding of the crucial role that singing plays in children's lives.

This publication seeks to ignite academic dialogue and enrich scholarly discussions on singing with children. Its goal is to advance vocal pedagogy while fostering a strong community of practice where educators, researchers, composers, and conductors can exchange ideas, challenge norms, and appreciate the transformative power of singing. This ongoing dialogue is essential for ensuring that the joy, discipline, and educational value of singing with children remain vibrant for future generations.

This volume continues to explore the diverse dimensions of singing with children, incorporating fresh insights and contributions from a range of international authors. Like its predecessor, the present volume delves into the multifaceted role of singing in children's lives, blending theoretical insights, practical applications, and case studies. Divided into three parts, this volume provides a comprehensive and nuanced view of how singing shapes children's development, offering educators, researchers, and practitioners both

scholarly perspectives and real-life examples that underscore the profound impact of this musical practice.

The *First Movement* begins with theoretical discussions on singing with children. The section focuses on folk songs as educational tools, exploring their traditional roots and significance in music education. In *Folk Songs: Tradition Embedded in Education*, the authors examine how these songs serve as cultural bridges, passing heritage between generations and fostering a sense of identity through music. The chapter *The Popular Music Repertoire in Singing with Children* shifts the focus to popular music, showing how it connects children's experiences with community and culturally sensitive teaching, thus promoting inclusion. The chapter *Developing Resonance in Children's Voices* addresses key aspects of vocal pedagogy, offering practical guidance on vocal health and techniques tailored to young, developing voices. *Musically and Vocally Underdeveloped Children in Music Education* presents strategies to support children facing vocal challenges, particularly through playful activities that encourage vocal development. Finally, *School Choirs as Agents for Cultural Bridge Builders in South Africa* highlights how choirs in a culturally and linguistically diverse country can act as unifying forces, promoting understanding and social cohesion.

The *Second Movement* shifts to practical approaches, showcasing examples of singing programs in various contexts. These chapters guide educators and choir directors in implementing effective, inclusive singing practices that engage children from diverse backgrounds. Real-life examples underscore the importance of creativity, movement, and inclusivity in music education, as seen in *The Influence of Movement in Music Education* explores how incorporating movement into singing enhances children's musical and cognitive development. The chapter *Vocal Pedagogy and Musical Competence in Italian Schools* critically examines how Italian schools integrate singing into broader educational frameworks, offering ideas for improvement. In *Understanding Agency of Young Singers*, the authors explore pedagogical approaches that nurture children's confidence and autonomy in music-making. The final chapter in this section, *Singing with Children: Exploring Educational Pathways*, delves into various models of singing pedagogy and their impact on children's individual and collective musical development.

The *Third Movement* presents case studies that explore how singing programs bridge cultural divides, foster social integration, and contribute to nation-building. These studies illustrate the transformative power of singing in schools, choirs, and community settings. For instance, *Comparative Approaches to Music Folklore in Music Education: The Czech Republic and South Tyrol (Italy)* provides a detailed look at how folk traditions are incorporated into school curricula in two regions. *United Through Song: The Role*

of *School Choirs in Nation Building* explores how South African choirs help overcome cultural and linguistic divides, positioning music as a powerful force for unity. The chapter *A Pathway to Inclusive Social Integration Through Singing* examines an ethnographic study of children in South Tyrol, Italy, showing how singing fosters a sense of belonging in multicultural communities. The volume concludes with *Perspectives on 'Jugendsingen'*, which examines youth singing in Austria and its role in shaping youth culture through choral education.

This edited collection gathers a range of perspectives on singing and vocal pedagogy, delving into how singing enriches cultural, social, and educational development across diverse settings. Each chapter offers valuable insights into the overlap of music education, vocal growth, and community involvement, underscoring the vital role of singing in children's learning experiences. Readers will come away with a deeper appreciation of singing as both an educational approach and a cultural tradition, bridging divides and supporting young voices.

For several compelling reasons, the volume also promotes international collaboration, exchange, and dialogue in singing pedagogy. First, incorporating varied cultural perspectives diversifies teaching methods, offering children a richer and more inclusive musical education. Unique vocal techniques and styles from different traditions enhance pedagogical practices, fostering a more global approach. Additionally, collaboration sparks innovation as educators learn from each other and embrace best practices worldwide. Lastly, dialogue fosters unity and helps address universal challenges, like promoting accessibility and inclusivity. This global exchange can potentially elevate the diversity and quality of choral music education for children everywhere.



# **1. First Movement: Theoretical Approach**



# 1.1 Folk Songs: Tradition Embedded in Education: An Exploration of Their Role in Music Education

by *Johann van der Sandt* and *Jiřina Jiřickov*

*Singing folk songs is vital for children  
to connect with their cultural roots  
and understand the values and traditions  
that shaped their heritage.*

Pete Seeger  
American folk musician  
and social activist (1919-2014)

## Introduction

Folk songs are vital vessels of cultural heritage, preserving our ancestors' memories, customs, and dialects (Dutta, Kikhi, 2016). They form the bedrock upon which musical traditions are built, reflecting a community's history, values, and social experiences (Harmon, Adams, 2018). In this chapter we look at the importance of folk songs in education today and argue for their inclusion in music lessons. We examine how these songs, which reflect the traditions of a nation, can be effectively integrated into the classroom and what role they play in the organisation of music lessons. Particular attention will be paid to the countries and regions in which the authors live and how folk songs are embedded in local music education systems. At the core of folk songs is a rich tapestry of emotional expression, intertwining past stories with connections to ancestors and childhood nostalgia (Dutta, Kikhi, 2016). Through their melodies and lyrics, our forebears infused these songs with the joys, sorrows, and everyday lives of ordinary people (Harmon, Adams, 2018; Dutta, Kikhi, 2016). The significance of folk songs extends beyond entertainment. They play a crucial role in children's musical development, laying a unique foundation for their growth and shaping their musicality (Dutta, Kikhi, 2016). Folk songs are a living legacy, passed down through generations, standing as a testament to the enduring spirit of a community (Harmon, Adams, 2018; Schulkin, Raglan, 2014).

Folk songs and folk music are significant in every country's cultural heritage. The term "folk song" originated from the German "Volkslied" (Pechcek, 2013). The term was first introduced by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) in 1771. Since then, considerable debate has been about what constitutes a folk song. For instance, Klusen (1967) proposed the term "group

song,” suggesting that “folk song” should be replaced with the concept of “group.” According to Černý (1996), the final form of a folk song is shaped by collective input, with various individuals beyond the original author contributing to its evolution, giving the song a distinctly collective character.

Bonuš (1952) categorises folk songs into several types, including secular songs such as narrative ballads, historical pieces, lyrical compositions, and ceremonial and sacred folk songs. Within the Czech context, Tyllner and Vejvoda (2019) highlight the lasting influence of Hungarian composer Béla Bartók’s (1881–1945) interpretation of folk music. Bartók viewed folk songs as creations that could emerge from the rural countryside and the working or middle classes in urban areas. Additionally, Tyllner and Vejvoda (2019) expand the definition of folk songs to include so-called marginal forms, such as cowboy songs, social and protest songs, workers’ songs, and songs by individual authors.

Folk songs are examined through the lenses of music folkloristics, ethnomusicology, and music anthropology, with these research approaches often overlapping. Votruba (2022) notes that folklore formations and folk songs are subject to evolution and migration, yet it remains unclear whether one of these principles dominates the other. The debate on how to best define and classify folk songs continues to engage folklorists, highlighting the complexity and diversity of perspectives in the field.

## **History and folk songs**

Singing has always been essential to social life, woven deeply into various ceremonies and traditions throughout history. Folk songs were sung to mark the birth of a child during funerals, celebrations, at work, and in play, often intertwined with entertainment, instrument playing, and dancing. These songs took on even greater importance during the 18th century. More broadly, folk music has profoundly influenced the identity and culture of communities across history. It is often tied to specific regions or groups, serving as a testament to their struggles, triumphs, and traditions. In many instances, folk music has acted as a catalyst for social and political change, playing a crucial role in the rise of revolutions and social movements.

Krček (2007) argues that singing activates the holistic nature of a person, engaging the physical, etheric, and astral bodies and the self. He suggests that those who frequently sing folk songs connect with the nation’s memory and achieve a sense of harmony. Historically, various nations began to collect folk songs, and in the Czech context, personalities like Karel Jaromír Erben, František Sušil, František Bartoš, and composer Leoš Janáček played pivotal



roles in this endeavour. During the 19th century, composers used folk music to emphasise nationalism in their works, as seen in the compositions of Antonín Dvořák, Petr Tchaikovsky, and Johannes Brahms. This blending of art music with folk elements persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with nationalists striving to incorporate authentic folk idioms and avoid superficial representations. Composers like Igor Stravinsky, Béla Bartók, and Aaron Copland extensively used folk themes to craft music that resonated with the cultural identity of specific nations.

Hebert and Kertz-Welzel (2016) argue that music has long served as a symbol of national identity in educational systems worldwide. Patriotic songs are often considered a vital part of the curriculum, fostering respect, loyalty, and “good citizenship” among students. However, the authors rightly question whether music educators have critically assessed the potential benefits and drawbacks of nationalism. Are we treading on dangerous ground when we promote nationalistic principles in education at the expense of inclusion, especially in an increasingly diverse and culturally heterogeneous world? With globalisation revolutionising international relations, the goal of promoting patriotism in music education may need re-evaluation. Hebert and Kertz-Welzel suggest that the fields of “peace studies” and “education for international understanding” might better align with the current values of the profession, which often conflict with nationalist impulses.

Tachi (2009) illustrates how folk music has evolved in response to societal changes and technological advancements. The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a folk revival, with musicians like Bob Dylan and Joan Baez using folk music to voice political views and protest social injustices. They introduced new instruments, such as the electric guitar, and employed recording techniques to create a more sophisticated sound. In the 1970s and 1980s, folk music continued to evolve, giving rise to subgenres like folk rock and Celtic folk. The popularity of these new styles made folk music accessible to a broader audience, helping to sustain the tradition, albeit in a changed form. Folk music has always been integral to social movements and political activism, reflecting the changing nature of traditions in a globalised world. Recognising these evolving traditions, it is impossible to overlook the cross-cultural influences of globalisation.

Just as African rhythms and traditions have profoundly influenced the American South’s blues music, the guitar’s use in Spanish flamenco can be traced back to the Moorish influence on Spanish culture. Even today, folk music’s regional variations and cross-cultural influences are rich and diverse.

In an increasingly homogenised world where cultural diversity often faces threats, folk music serves as a powerful reminder of the richness and beauty of our cultural heritage. It is essential that we continue to celebrate

and honour these timeless melodies, ensuring they inspire and entertain future generations. However, the future of folk music depends on its ability to adapt to changing times and technologies.

As times change and technology advances, folk music must evolve to remain relevant and resonate with new audiences. The audience we refer to here is the children in our music classes who will carry forward these traditions into the future.

## **Folk songs in music education**

Music educators view musical folklore (Kučerová and coll., 2019) as a vital carrier of cultural values with significant pedagogical potential and an integral part of national culture. In the early 1950s, Hungarian music educator and philosopher Zoltán Kodály emphasised that folk music and folk songs should be central to music education. The Kodály method, or philosophy, centres on providing children with a solid foundation in solfeggio using a movable doh system, which enhances their sight-singing, dictation, inner ear development, and music literacy abilities. Folk music and folk songs are essential components of this method.

Although folk music is an indispensable part of our cultural heritage and a rich source of inspiration, there appears to be little pedagogical research on using folk songs in schools and learners' attitudes toward this genre. Studies suggest that many learners do not fully embrace their cultural heritage (Kučerová and coll., 2019).

Learners' attitudes toward folk music are often influenced by how relevant and connected they feel to their cultural heritage. Music education has significant potential to foster this connection. When learners understand folk music's cultural significance and historical context, their appreciation for it grows. Andrew (Andrew 2011) emphasises the value of recognising and utilising the rich knowledge of folk music children bring from home to school, particularly in contemporary multicultural discussions and lessons. By finding ways to address the diverse perspectives on folk songs from different cultures didactically, educators can deepen students' engagement and appreciation.

The distinctive richness of folk music provides a valuable foundation for composers interested in exploring new techniques. Since folk music traditions predate the emergence of tonal music in the 16th and 17th centuries, they provide—and continue to provide—a melodic and harmonic framework that is not tonally centred yet still evokes a sense of familiarity in listeners.

The following section presents a concise overview of the musical characteristics of folk songs in the countries where the authors of this article are based.

## **Czech folk songs**

As noted by Votruba (Votruba 2022), Czech folk songs strongly resemble those from other Slavic nations while also showing signs of German influence. Additionally, there are significant connections with Polish and Slovakian music. Within the Czech Republic, folk songs can be broadly categorised into two types: those from Bohemia and Western Moravia and those from Eastern Moravia.

Kučerová (Kučerová 2008) describes the first type, the Western song type, as being characterised by a major-minor system with a predominant major tonality. These songs feature a staggered triplet rhythm, big melodic leaps, clear periodic and motivic structures and regular rhythmic values. Typically, these songs are set in 3/4- or 3/8-time signatures, with some dances presented in alternating times. The song forms are usually structured in two or three voices, often based on contrasting elements.

The second type, the Eastern song type, is primarily rooted in a pre-harmonic melodic approach. While major and minor songs exist within this category, the melodies often employ incomplete scales, commonly using the Lydian, melodic, Dorian, or occasionally Phrygian modes. These songs tend to have irregular structures, with rhythms that naturally align with the word flow. Dance songs in this style are generally in 2/4 time, and agogics are common in slower pieces. The harmonies vary, and the musical forms do not follow regular structures or principles of contrast (Kučerová, 2008).

Folk songs are undeniably profoundly embedded in specific regions or communities' traditional and cultural expressions. Historically, these songs were often sung within the family, a tradition that remains alive in many cultures today. However, in the increasingly globalised European society, there is a growing emphasis on the role of schools in teaching pupils about folk songs and traditions.

The academic study of folk songs has been ongoing for well over a century, often comparing them with other musical forms across different countries or traditional and modern music. However, the focus of this article is not primarily on the study of folk music itself. Instead, it aims to examine the factors influencing the use of folk music in music education within schools accessible to all children.

## **South Tyrolean folk songs**

South Tyrol, a culturally distinct area in northern Italy, stands out for its rich and diverse folk music tradition, partly shaped by the region's intricate political history. In South Tyrol, the Italian and German languages have co-existed for a significant time, spanning several decades. Nestled in the heart of the Alps, this multilingual province has cultivated a unique musical identity that reflects its agricultural heritage and strong ties to the natural world. As noted in a study on agritourism, South Tyrol's agricultural landscape has played a fundamental role in shaping its cultural identity (Sidali and coll., 2019). After a turbulent phase in the early 20th century, stability was achieved through a comprehensive programme to protect the German-speaking minority. Although these measures were originally designed to preserve the linguistic identity of both the Italian and German-speaking communities, they have also contributed to a strong cultural and traditional continuity, particularly within the German-speaking population of South Tyrol.

A defining characteristic of South Tyrolean folk music is its deep connection to the local landscape and traditional ways of life. Many of the region's songs and melodies draw inspiration from themes related to the Alpine pastures, dense forests, and the intricate network of rivers and streams that crisscross the area. The music often mirrors the rhythms and sounds of everyday agricultural activities, such as herding cattle or harvesting crops. This strong link between music and nature underscores the profound bond between the people of South Tyrol and their environment (Sidali and coll., 2019).

South Tyrol's rich cultural heritage, partly rooted in its Austrian connections, is vividly reflected in its varied folk music traditions. These traditions have evolved over centuries and continue to captivate audiences locally and beyond (Haid, 1976). The German Romantics emphasised music as a "national cult" within the German-speaking parts of Europe, noting that even emperors and princes patronised orchestras and composers (Cœuroy, 1927). This longstanding tradition and institutional support have bolstered the prominence of folk music in German-speaking Europe, and it remains a crucial aspect of the cultural identity in these regions (Cœuroy, 1927).

Another notable aspect of South Tyrolean folk music is its significant regional diversity. While there are common elements across the province, each valley and community has developed its distinct musical styles and repertoire, shaped by local cultural and linguistic influences. This diversity is also reflected in the wide array of traditional instruments, singing techniques, and melodic and rhythmic patterns found throughout the region. The essence of South Tyrolean folk songs lies in their simple yet captivating melodies and lyrics, which are easily memorised and repeated by listeners (Bernhart,

2017). These qualities make them excellent tools for identifying musical intervals and rhythms enhancing music theory instruction (Haid, 1976). Moreover, folk songs complement the natural rhythm of the German language, aiding learners in language acquisition (Nuessel, Cicogna, 1991).

Beyond their educational benefits, folk songs are deeply rooted in South Tyrolean cultural heritage, allowing for spontaneous singing at social gatherings (Bernhart, 2017). In this way, they represent a living tradition, offering a versatile repertoire suitable for various occasions and accessible to everyone, regardless of musical ability or age (Bernhart, 2017).

From the perspective of those within the community, folk songs serve as a unifying force, helping to foster a shared sense of identity and cultural belonging (Bernhart, 2017). The inherent accessibility and enjoyment of singing these songs make language learning more child-centred and enjoyable, an important aspect often overlooked by educators and course designers (Richards, 1969).

## **Music education in the Czech Republic and South Tyrol**

### ***The Czech Republic***

Folk songs from Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, i.e. from parts of the Czech Republic, have been the basis of general and specialised music education in Czech schools for over a hundred years. “Musical education is one of the important means that contribute to the preservation of traditions and the transmission of values created by previous generations” (Grobár and coll., 2019: 3) and singing folk songs is considered an integral and natural component of music teaching, contributing significantly to the effective organisation of music lessons (Sedlák, 1977; Kvapil, 1990/1991; Sedláček, 1999; Kučerová, 2023).

Historically, the intonation methods used in Czech schools were based on these folk songs (Lýsek, 1967; Daniel; 1992, 1994), and they also served as the foundation and inspiration for the musical material in the Orff-Schulwerk adaptation, as recorded in the publications titled *The Czech Orff-Schulwerk* (Hurník and coll., 1969; 1972; Keller and coll., 1969).

“Framework Education Programme for Primary and Lower Secondary Education” (FEPPL, 2023), which outlines the national education standards in the Czech Republic, underscores that singing songs is an essential aspect of music education. Through vocal, instrumental, musical movement, and listening activities, students gain an understanding of music, learn to perceive it actively and use singing and music as a means of communication.

The specific area of arts and culture in this educational framework, where music education is primarily implemented, emphasises the development of students' vocal potential through solo, group, and choral singing (FEPPLE, 2023: 81).

According to the FEPPLE (2023), the content of singing activities in primary music education focuses on cultivating vocal and linguistic expression through applying and reinforcing proper singing habits.

The current framework education programme outlines a continuous general music education incorporating vocal activities. For primary school children, the curriculum emphasises the following aspects of vocal development:

- **Singing and speaking:** Developing singing skills, including proper breathing, pronunciation, sound production, and dynamically differentiated singing.
- **Vocal hygiene and range extension:** Focusing on vocal health and extending vocal range, along with rhythmizing songs in 2/4-, 3/4-, and 4/4-time signatures. This includes exploring double and polyphonic singing techniques like delay, canon, and folk double voice.
- **Intonation and vocal improvisation:** Practicing diatonic techniques in major and minor keys (V, III, and I, with free onsets of VIII and lower V).
- **Musical games:** Engaging in echo singing and question-and-answer games to enhance vocal skills.
- **Recording vocal music:** Learning to capture the melody of a song using simple graphic methods, understanding music notation as a graphic symbol for tones, and notating the rhythm of simple songs to aid in song realisation.

These components are designed to build a strong foundation in vocal skills, ensuring that students receive a well-rounded music education from an early age (FEPPLE 2023: 84). At the lower secondary level, the curriculum expands on the foundational skills of students with a deeper focus on vocal development and cultural expression. The curriculum includes the following components:

- **Singing and speaking:** Extending vocal range, maintaining vocal hygiene, addressing vocal weaknesses and mutations, and exploring polyphonic and monophonic singing. Techniques of vocal expression, such as scat and falsetto, are introduced, with applications in solo and group vocal-instrumental activities.
- **Intonation and vocal improvisation:** Continued practice of diatonic techniques in major and minor keys.

- **Improvisation of simple musical forms:** Encouraging creativity by exploring basic musical structures.
- **Musical rhythm:** Understanding the relationship between speech and musical rhythm and applying rhythmic principles in vocal expression.
- **Orientation in vocal notation:** Using music notation as a tool to support the realisation of songs and more complex vocal or vocal-instrumental compositions.
- **Development of musical hearing and imagination:** Reproducing tones and melodies and using graphic or musical notation to capture the rhythm or melody of a song.
- **Reflection on vocal expression:** Analysing personal and others' vocal expression and finding ways to correct vocal deficiencies, such as transposing melodies or incorporating other musical activities.

The educational framework programme for primary and lower secondary education emphasises these specific skills and their connection to broader competencies, including the application of knowledge in practical life. The framework (FEPPL, 2023) highlights the inclusion of folk songs as part of the curriculum, and the draft revision introduces new competencies in cultural awareness and expression (Klíčová kompetence kulturní – Revize RVP, n.d.).

The educational area Arts and Culture in the curriculum, where music education is primarily implemented, plays a crucial role in developing cultural awareness and respect for diversity. The current draft curriculum explicitly emphasises the importance of cultural heritage, including the interpretation, reception, and reflection of folk music.

Mandatory learning outcomes include exposure to folk songs, understanding cultural context, and communicating thoughts and feelings through various forms. By the end of Year 5, students are expected to have a broader awareness of their own culture, and by the end of Year 9, they should understand art and culture as expressions of thoughts, emotions, experiences, and values, as well as a means of learning about the world and communicating creatively.

To reinforce the tradition of singing folk songs in schools, studies indicate that Czech teachers incorporate folklore into their lessons, recognising the importance of musical-folklore heritage in the development of students' personalities, cultural and social lives, and pedagogical activities (Kučerová and coll., 2019). However, the effectiveness of teaching folk songs can be influenced by teachers' engagement with music in their free time.

Research also shows that students are not inherently enthusiastic about folk music (Kučerová and coll., 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to explore

innovative ways to present folk songs and cultural heritage (Chloupek and coll., 2021; Kučerová and coll., 2019). Teachers are encouraged to use strategies that integrate local folk songs into music lessons, connect folk music with other subjects, and employ interactive and participatory methods, often aligned with the seasonal calendar.

Several Czech authors have addressed the significance of using folk songs in schools, offering concrete methodological suggestions. Kvapil (1990/1991) emphasises the irreplaceable role of folk songs in education. Jurkovič (1993/1994) presents topics for working with folk songs that still resonate with children today, while Jenčková (2002) provides strategies for motivating students to learn folk songs and offers an integrated approach to music education within the context of folk traditions.

## **South Tyrol**

In Italy, the explicit mention of singing with children as a targeted learning activity is relatively limited and vaguely formulated. Aesthetic education for kindergarten-aged children (*Scuola dell'infanzia*, 3–6 years) is described in broad terms, mentioning the voice as one of the possible “languages” available to children for developing a sense of beauty, self-knowledge, and understanding of others and reality. While children are encouraged to explore the soundscape through activities involving perception and musical production using their voice, body, and appropriate objects, singing, specific songs, or competencies related to singing are not explicitly mentioned.

In the curriculum for primary school children (*Scuola primaria*, 6–10 years), singing is briefly mentioned alongside playing musical instruments, creative productions, and listening activities. However, by the end of primary school, there is no explicit focus on developing vocal skills; instead, the various expressive qualities of the voice are simply mentioned along with other sound objects and musical instruments. The broad and vague nature of the curriculum becomes evident when activities such as exploring the voice, sound objects, and musical instruments are listed in the same breath as listening and learning to read music.

The objectives for skill development at the end of secondary school (*Scuola secondaria di primo grado*, 11–14 years) in Italy do not differ significantly from those of primary school, as singing or the achievement of specific singing skills is not explicitly mentioned as a developmental goal. Formal music education is not a standard part of the curriculum for Italian secondary school students (*Scuola secondaria di secondo grado*, 14–19 years), except in specialised music and art schools. In these institutions,



while music lessons are more frequent than in other schools, little attention is devoted to developing specific singing skills. Singing is typically mentioned alongside playing an instrument, primarily to deepen theoretical understanding of music.

While the Italian national curriculum does not emphasise singing, regional differences can be significant. An examination of South Tyrol's curricula—an autonomous province in northern Italy with three officially recognised language groups: German, Italian, and Ladin—reveals a more detailed and specific focus on singing skills, particularly in documents governing German-speaking schools. There are notable differences between the curriculum documents for Italian and German-speaking schools in South Tyrol. Both sets of documents for kindergarten mention music-making and singing, specifically using the voice as an instrument to enhance communication skills.

The curriculum documents for Italian schools in South Tyrol generally align with the national Italian curriculum. However, the curricula for German-speaking schools in South Tyrol place a greater emphasis on singing activities. In these schools, singing is recognised as a separate skill, with clearly defined competence objectives for the end of primary and secondary education. By the end of primary school, children are expected to “express personal and communal experiences through the singing of simple songs by heart, paying attention to posture, hearing, voice, and language.” (Deutsche Schulamt 2009: 54). They should also be able to use their voice in various ways—chanting, monophonic and polyphonic singing, text composition—while paying attention to breathing, posture, and articulation techniques (Deutsche Schulamt 2009: 54). At the intermediate level, students are expected to “express emotions and feelings when singing and apply knowledge of music theory.” (Deutsche Schulamt 2009: 69)

In South Tyrol, comprehensive musical education is available to students who attend special secondary schools focused on music, designed for those inclined toward further musical studies at the university level. Similarly, high school music lessons are only offered in select schools, where singing is used more to acquire or strengthen other musical skills rather than as a primary focus.

In summary, the current Italian school curricula reference specific skills to be achieved without prioritising singing over other musical competencies. However, a more detailed and focused approach to singing as a skill is evident in the curricula and guidelines of German-speaking schools in South Tyrol.

## Conclusion

Folk songs are invaluable not only as an educational tool and as a means of promoting cultural awareness, but also as a reflection of the human experience. Music education deepens the appreciation of folk songs as part of the cultural tradition and provides an opportunity to explore their content and unique musical language. It encourages students to develop a personal connection to music through shared experiences and empathy with the context in which these songs are performed.

The role of folk songs goes beyond the music classroom. They have the potential to serve as an important integrative element in the curriculum and promote community awareness and regional identity. Singing folk songs plays a crucial role in developing students' language skills, social awareness and emotional intelligence. By bringing these songs into the classroom, we are not only preserving traditions and celebrating cultural heritage, but also providing students with a richer and more engaging learning experience. Folk songs not only provide structure and continuity, but also create a space for nurturing creative qualities. Singing folk songs fosters a sense of community, stirs emotions and provides many positive musical experiences. There is no doubt that folk songs are an essential part of modern educational practice and their inclusion in general education should be seen as a fundamental necessity.

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## 1.2 The Popular Music Repertoire in Singing with Children: A Perspective Bringing Together Community Music and Culturally Responsive Teaching

by *Carlo Nardi*

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss some common issues surrounding the use of popular music in singing with children, in particular, but not exclusively, in collective singing situations. I will initially address the issue of adopting a popular music repertoire in relation to the physiology of children's voices. Then, with regard to cultural distinctions, I will reflect on the intergenerational advantages and disadvantages in the teacher-child relationship. I will also consider potentially problematic issues related to songs' content that reproduce ethnocentric, discriminatory or non-age-appropriate ideas, showing how culturally responsive pedagogy can help in dealing with those issues while supporting transformative, empowering, transformative, multidimensional, and emancipatory learning (Gay 2018).

In addition, I would like to contribute to the existing debate on this topic by focussing on how community music, as a field of practice and a value orientation, can offer some useful guidelines to music educators engaging children with a popular music repertoire. I advocate with Hooley (2019) for a dialectical approach to the educational relationship, where instead of imposing a truth – i.e., the correct way of singing – a music facilitator (Cremata 2017; Higgins 2012) can encourage a situated collaboration through a democratic circulation of knowledge between all those involved. This proves particularly advantageous when people with a different musical background meet. Whether differences are due to class, age or other reasons, the enforcement of a specific way of singing risks 'silencing' the individual and devaluing alternative approaches to music-making. In this regard, Good-Perkins suggests a "diversification of vocal education [that] would allow for a more humane approach to voice teaching in which each student's vocal 'funds of

knowledge' are celebrated, sustained, and recognized as worthy." (Good-Perkins 2020: 160)

Community music emphasises music-making where everyone is welcome and can actively contribute to the creative process. It normally applies to informal and non-formal learning contexts but can also inspire pedagogical choices in formal contexts. It restores to music its emancipatory and empowering functions (van der Sandt 2019). While it acknowledges the existence of value judgements that link music to context, community music does not intend to subordinate educational practices to those values and the cultural hierarchies that they represent. Finally, it does not regard the learner, each learner, as an empty vessel to be filled according to an information deficit model, but rather invites them into a reflective process as active players. In this, the role of the facilitator is crucial as someone who can support the successful deployment of learning opportunities for all in a mutually respectful environment.

Therefore, community music grants a pedagogical alternative for those who are on the margins or otherwise do not have access to music education through institutional channels (Koopman 2007). Finally, community music emphasises the importance of intergenerational learning as a vehicle to support not only dialogue between generations but also reflexivity in the educational relationship (Barrett and Westerlund 2017; Beynon and Alfano 2013; Higgins and Willingham 2017; Tsugawa 2022).

The aim of this discussion is twofold: firstly, to stress that physiological and cultural aspects are inevitably and inextricably intertwined; secondly, to suggest how a participatory, democratic and inclusive approach, as promoted by culturally responsive pedagogy and community music, can turn differences in taste and knowledge between teacher and child, as well as those between children from different backgrounds, into opportunities for establishing a more critical, democratic, inclusive and reflexive pedagogical relationship.

## **Using popular songs with children**

Everyone nowadays is most likely exposed to popular music to some degree, which makes it advisable for teachers to consider children's as well as their own knowledge in the matter as an asset. Campbell and Scott-Kassner notice that children already incorporate popular music in their spontaneous singing due to their exposure to it: "With increasing exposure to standard nursery rhymes, chants, and songs, as well as to folk and popular songs, preschool children are often integrating rather sophisticated rhythmic patterns

into their spontaneous songs.” (Campbell and Scott-Kassner 2010: 156) This means at least two things: children normally possess a rich albeit implicit musical knowledge from which a teacher can draw to build a meaningful pedagogical relationship. Secondly, this knowledge, as part of the identity of a child that spills over to their daily life out of the music classroom, should not be overlooked or erased but, rather, encouraged and recognized for its value.

Two advantages for teachers in choosing popular music songs to sing with children are to work with material that is familiar to them and to create a bond through a repertoire closer to the children’s taste. However, the second motivation may cause misunderstandings for different reasons. Firstly, the teacher’s tastes may be different or simply outdated compared to those of the children. Secondly, different children will probably have different musical preferences, which are partly a reflection of sociocultural distinctions.

At any rate, using popular music in the classroom can be problematic on many levels. It should be noted that, as for any type of music, it is shaped by the context in which it is produced, distributed and consumed. Somigli and Bratus (2020: 15) stress that it is important to conceive of music as a multi-dimensional activity characterised by technical and stylistic aspects as well as social and industrial ones. In other words, the commercial and media landscape to which popular music belongs will transfer, to some degree, to the educational setting, bringing with it its agenda, values, stereotypes, and ideology. While this assumption is more intuitive for music intended for adults, similar considerations can be applied to music produced and commercialised expressly for children’s consumption (Giuffre: 2013).

Some songs may not be suitable for children or for some of the children inside a group for various reasons (range and pitch, ethnic stereotypes, sexism, etc.). Of course, similar observations apply to other types of music. Rather than using these considerations for ruling out the option of including popular songs in children’s repertoire, it is clear that the choice and adaptation of the repertoire to singing with children requires careful pedagogical reflection (Kallio 2017). In particular, using popular music demands both an acceptance of and a willingness to understand the musical background of the children as well a deep familiarity with the material used, including its connection with the cultural and social framework in which it is embedded. As we shall see later, a culturally responsive approach can help to overcome some of these obstacles and even turn them into learning opportunities.

## Physiological aspects of singing

The adoption of popular musical styles and singing techniques in the music classroom often raises concerns due to the fact that such music, being mainly made by adults for adults, can be problematic when adopted by children due to the different physiology of their voices. It is safe to generalize that children, during primary years, have a most comfortable range or tessitura, which is within an interval of a sixth and a preferred vocal delivery in the use of the head register or head voice (Boyer and Rozmajzl 2014: 251). For a description of the most apt range for children at different ages, see for instance Campbell and Scott-Kassner (2010: 68–70).

This notwithstanding, several authors not only argue for the use of popular music in the music classroom (Green 2006; Smith and coll. 2017; Wood 2007; Yu 2024) but also stress its advantages for children's voices. In order to sustain a lifelong vocal health, it is important to learn to sing in a way that does not harm the vocal mechanism and with vocal techniques that are constitutive of a particular popular music style: "When younger students can learn to sing popular music styles with good technique endemic to the style in which they are singing, they are more likely to have positive experiences as singers throughout their lives." (Clauhs, Powell and Clements 2021: 88)

Clauhs (Clauhs and coll., 2021) distinguish between genre-specific and universal elements of good singing, where the term 'good' is not employed as an aesthetic marker but rather as a way to establish some foundations from which specific vocal techniques can be developed. According to these authors, "[g]ood singing habits include an understanding and practice of (1) posture, (2) supportive breath, (3) phonation, and (4) singing range and vocal register." (Clauhs and coll. 2021: 90) Once they have acquired the basics of good singing, students can begin to learn more advanced skills, such as belting or other genre-specific techniques.

We may also want to make a further differentiation between popular music repertoire and its techniques. In fact, as much as it is important to adapt the repertoire to children's vocal development, certain techniques, such as beatboxing, improvisation or call and response, are often fruitfully included in the music curriculum as such: i.e., not necessarily in relation to a particular repertoire. Indeed, many music teachers and scholars support the adoption of particular popular singing techniques and identify specific reasons why popular music can be a resource. Moreover, we can find parallels between popular music singing and styles found in world music singing, which can be used also for warm-ups. About this, Bithell (2014: 147) mentions techniques commonly used in popular music and jazz such as belting and twang.