

The study on the pedagogy of breath in the teaching singing for children

Li Lei,
Orawan Banchongsilpa and Pavinee Teeravut
Bangkokthonburi University, Bangkok, Thailand
Corresponding Author, E-mail: 172423801@qq.com

Abstracts

Singing is the preferred subject for parents to have their children learn, and the methods of teaching singing to children are receiving more attention. Children have physical and psychological characteristics that do not apply to adult teaching methods. We need to find similarities and differences between children's singing performance and adult singing performance training. The similarities are captured in children's singing performance training, and the theoretical knowledge is translated into a context children can understand. The author has studied and practiced a lot and developed a method of teaching singing breath that considers children's physiological and psychological characteristics, with good results.

Keyword: The Study on the pedagogy; Breath of Teaching; Singing for Children

Introduction

As the standard of living of the Chinese people gradually improves and the quality of people's education continues to grow, children's art education is receiving more and more attention from parents and the community. Singing is the subject of choice for parents to have their children learn, and methods of teaching singing to children are receiving more attention. Children are at a developmental stage of physiological and psychological growth. Much of the theoretical and performance discourse on singing is aimed primarily at teaching adults above the tertiary level. Most of these people are physiologically mature and can think and learn independently, so they can learn and apply these artistic theories well and achieve better results (Saburo, 1990:1).

On the other hand, children are still at a physiological and psychological stage of development and have a relatively difficult time learning adult art theory. Especially when it comes to some of the body's organs, children are intimidated when they see pictures of the body's organs, leading to a fear of learning. Is it then impossible to teach with these professional art theories? We need to find the similarities and differences between children's singing performance and adult singing performance training. It is worth exploring and studying how to capture the similarities in children's singing performance training, how to translate the theoretical knowledge into a context that children can understand, and how to understand the physiological characteristics of children before teaching them.

The first thing it needs to do when learning to sing is to breathe. Breathing is presented throughout the singing process. However, the breathing organ is invisible and abstract in our body, making it difficult for children to learn. The author has read much literature. After more than ten years of teaching practice, combined with children's physiological and psychological characteristics, it is concluded that a breathing teaching method is used. This breath teaching includes inhalation, exhalation, breath control, and breath use (Cao, 1993:4).

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Breathing is a skill humans are all born with. Children breathe on their own from the moment they are born. This leads many people to believe that breathing is a part of life that does not need to be learned. This is not the case. Breathing plays a vital role in singing. Moreover, it is different from everyday breathing in that it has to lay a solid foundation for singing everywhere. In order to teach singing more scientifically, the author has clarified every aspect of breathing (Su & Wang, 2017:4).

Respiratory organs

The main respiratory organs for singing are the mouth, nose, throat, larynx, windpipe, bronchi (left and right), and lungs (left and right). The lungs are located in the chest cavity of our body and are surrounded by the thoracic cavity, which consists of the rib cage and associated muscles. At the base of the lungs is the diaphragm (commonly known as the "rib cage"), which looks like an inverted "bowl" and divides the chest and abdominal cavities into two parts. This is the basic movement of the singing breath.

When teaching children about the organs of breathing, it can talk about the mouth and nose, but the children often do not understand the pharynx, larynx, and trachea. It is difficult to continue teaching because these airways cannot be seen or touched. After teaching, the author changed the names of these airways into words they can usually come into contact with, such as toys or food, and found commonalities between them and their names to teach them, with good results.

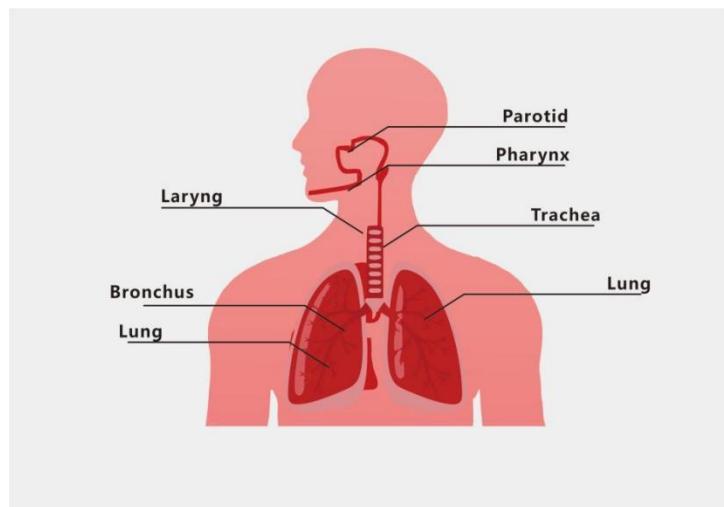


Figure 1, Respiratory System
Source: Li Lei, 2022

1) Little Pipes

The pharynx, larynx, trachea and bronchi are the places where the air flows through and they need to open when singing, so these organs are collectively known as the "Little Pipes" (Yang, 2002:4).

2) Big Balloon

The lung is the organ that stores gas. In children's everyday lives, a toy that stores gas and that they can often come into contact with is a balloon. When you blow into a balloon, it expands and when you release it, the air flows out of the opening and the balloon gets smaller. This is the same as when we breathe, which is why author refer to the lungs as the "big balloon " when teaching singing.

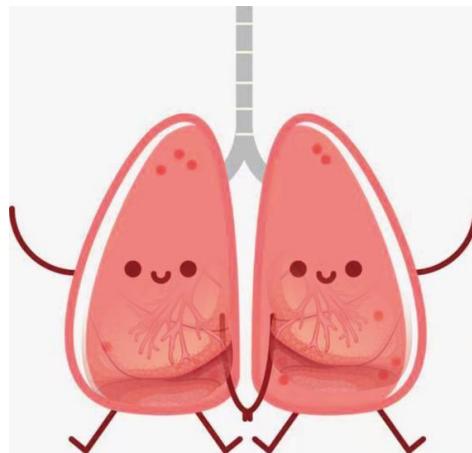


Figure 2, Big Balloon
Source: Li Lei, 2022

3) Little Ribs

The lungs are located in the chest cavity of our body and are surrounded by the rib cage and associated chest muscles. Contraction of the lungs increases and decreases the size of the chest cavity, thus changing the volume within the chest cavity and aiding breathing and air control. When the children found the ribs, they summed up the characteristics of the ribs by saying, "They look like little bones in a row," which immediately livened up the class and helped the students to remember. From then on, whenever it talked about the chest and breathing muscles, the author used the term "little ribs."

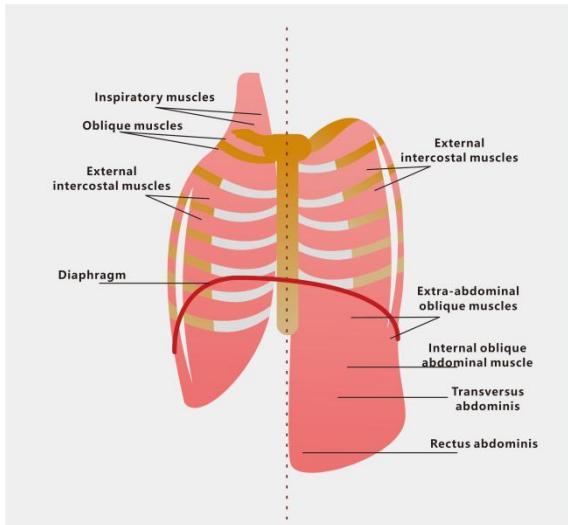


Figure 3, Little Ribs
Source: Li Lei, 2022

4) Little Belly

The diaphragm divides the thoracic and abdominal cavities into two parts. The abdominal muscles are also in motion when the diaphragm is in motion. For teaching purposes, the internal intercostal and abdominal muscles are called the "little belly."

The word "little" is used for most of these respiratory organs because in a child's world, "little" is more accessible and easier to accept, except in the case of the lungs, where we emphasize the capacity of the breath and therefore use the word "big." As the pupils get older, it is important to link the names of the organs to the current nomenclature of children's singing organs so that the children can go into more depth (Leng, 1999:5).

Breathing in singing

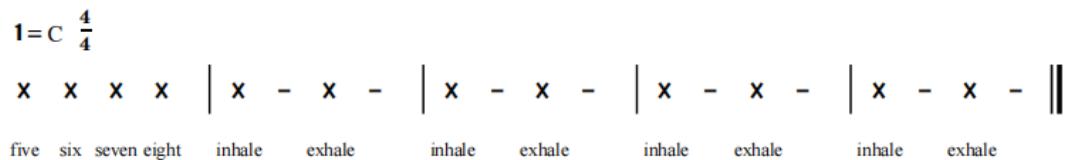
The combined thoracoabdominal breathing method is the current scientific method recognized in vocal music. In Mr. Zhou's theory of the art of vocal singing, he talks about the process of inhaling through the mouth and nose simultaneously, passing through the mouth, pharynx, larynx, trachea, bronchi, and finally into the lungs. The chest and abdominal cavities expand simultaneously, drawing the air into the lungs, and the base of the lungs - the diaphragm - naturally sinks and expands in all directions. This is the time to control the breath with the diaphragm, the muscle groups of the lower back and abdomen together with the muscles of the blind fiddle not. The exhalation is then a joint effort of the abdominal muscles and the diaphragm to exhale the inhaled breath according to the needs of the singing (Guo, 2009:5).

In adult knowledge, understanding the above passage should be very simple, and one may have experience applying it. However, when teaching children, some of the pupils will still need to recognize the words in it clearly, and understanding it will be more difficult and, in practice, much more difficult. What can be done if singing still needs to be taught in such circumstances? In his many years of teaching, the author has summarised the following methods for practicing breathing (Li, 1998:8).

1) Method of breathing like a balloon.

Balloon breathing is about breathing, inhaling to the bottom of the lungs, and relaxing back into place as you exhale. It is not enough to say this when teaching children. Each part of the process should be well requested and worked in unison. It helps to teach in terms that are acceptable to the child. Do the following exercises: Stand still and find the "little ribs" of the body that protect the "big balloon." Breathe into the "big balloon" with your nose as if you were smelling a flower and sink to the bottom of the "big balloon." After inhaling the 'big balloon,' the 'little ribs' will open up; this is the inhalation. After a good inhalation, the whole body relaxes, the gas in the "big balloon" is exhaled, and the "little ribs" and the "big balloon" return to their original position; this is an exhalation. One inhalation and one exhalation is a balloon breathing technique (Qi, 2019:5).

At the beginning of the learning process, the author organizes the children's practice by calling out the commands herself, e.g.:



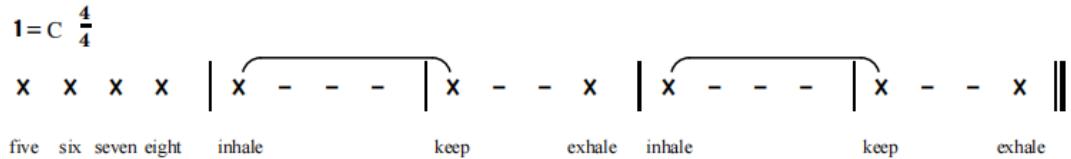
This is a rhythm for the children to make it easier for them to move in unison and for the teacher to check in unison. The "-" is the time for the children to do it. The pupils have one beat to practice and another to listen to the marching orders, so there is more time for good execution. Once this exercise is mastered, more than one exercise can be done with the help of music. The author uses the classic children's song "Plucking the Carrot" for training, which has a suitable tempo and short, clear passages, and performs the exercises while singing and pausing during the interludes.

1) Method of controlling breathing with ribs.

The method of breath control is actually about controlling the breath that is inhaled into the lungs to prepare us for breathing. In Mr. Zhou's theory of the art of singing, this is often called "catching the breath." In the method of breath control, during inhalation, the diaphragm contracts and sinks, increasing the size of the chest cavity; during breath control, the diaphragm remains as still as possible but not rigid; it is a relaxed state of continuous expansion; during exhalation, in contrast to inhalation, the diaphragm relaxes and stretches, and the chest cavity shrinks.

The emphasis here is on controlling and holding the "small ribs," the rib cage, and respiratory muscles that regulate and control the breath. When practicing, ensure each step is done correctly before moving on to the next. As far as possible, let the children do and check each step themselves. The contacting step is to stand still and, using the balloon breathing method, inhale and do not exhale immediately, but keep the 'big balloon' open for 8-10 seconds after inhaling. As breathing control improves, the children can continue to increase the time in holding their breath but not hold it for any length. When they exhaled at the end of the exercise, the children completed one exercise of controlling breathing with their ribs (Liu, 2013:8).

At the very beginning of the exercise, the children are again organized by shouting the command first. The command is:

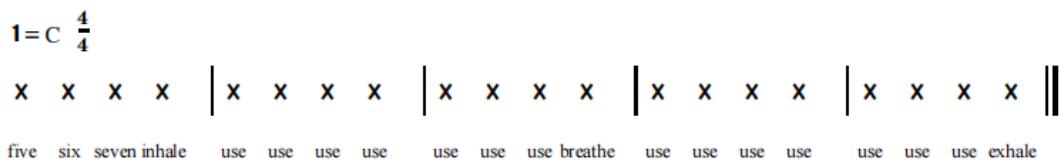


This allows children to practice controlling the air for eight beats. Once they are confident, music can be chosen for training. The author uses the classic nursery rhyme 'A Pug,' which has the right rhythm and tempo and is a great piece of practice music to use when the words are sung, just in time to practice two 8-beats, with a break for the interlude.

1) Method of using breathing like a small silkworm spitting silk.

Using breathing like a small silkworm spitting silk is an exercise in using breathing. Based on the method of breathing like a balloon and the method of controlling breathing with the ribs, the diaphragm works actively to push towards the lungs, sending the air from the lungs to the vocal cords and beyond, and then relaxes when the air is not needed, returning each part to its original position. In teaching children, the following is done: based on the rib air control method, the "little belly" is found under the "little ribs," and when the air is used, the "little belly," which was slightly open, is pushed towards the "big balloon." "The "little belly" will shrink as the air is pushed into the "big balloon" and this is the first time the air is used. When the air is pumped, it flows through the mouth and rubs against the teeth, making a "si" sound, similar to the sound a silkworm makes when it spits out silk. To make it easier for children to understand, the sound of a small silkworm spitting out silk is used to name the method of using breathing like a small silkworm spitting silk (Chen, 2021:7).

When practicing, the command is



This command should be given slowly, but give the children time to hear the command and then carry it out. Using this command, the children can practice eight breaths at a time, which is very effective. Then it is time to practice music. The music for the Little Silkworm Spitting Breath method is 'The Painters', with a change of breath in two verses and one breath per beat. In this way, breathing, breath control, and the use of the breath are linked (Liu, 2001:7).

When practiced in this way, it saves the author time in checking that the children are practicing correctly and greatly increases the efficiency of the teaching. The class model, which could only be taught one-to-one with good results, was improved to allow one-to-many teaching.

Expanding the breathing in singing

Breathing exercises for singing are rich and varied. Different songs have different breathing techniques due to the melodic direction and language used, and our body's breathing muscles need to be changed according to different requirements. For example: using the breath for slow songs, using the breath for fast songs, using the breath for strength and weakness, and so on. So, there will be many extensions to our breathing technique. They can be roughly divided into the following categories:

(1) Quick inhalation and quick exhalation

Quick inhalation and exhalation are usually used in songs with a relatively quick rhythm. For example, in the children's song "The Smurfs," the breathing rate is very fast, and the song's rhythm is very fast, so it is important to practice breathing and exhaling at a fast pace.

(2) Quick inhalation and slow exhalation

Quick inhalation and slow exhalation will be used in songs where the speed of breath change is very limited, and the phrases are long. This is the case with the children's song 'Snowdrop.' The song is slow but long, to be sung on the last beat of each measure, followed immediately by a breath change. When singing, slow exhalation is the process of slow use of breath, specifically to train the control and use of breath for long notes (Zhan, 2011:3).

(3) Slow inhalation and slow exhalation

Slow inhalation and slow exhalation will be reflected in a song where breathing is also to be turned into an artistic treatment. For example, the line "The enemy picked up Er Xiao at the tip of his gun and dropped him to his death on a big rock" in the song "Singing Er Xiao to the Cowherd" describes the scene in which Wang Er Xiao, the cowherd, leads the enemy into the ambush circle. The enemy angrily drops Er Xiao to his death, which is tragic (Wu, 2010:3).

The author gave an example of a song based on the air-breathing method, with many similar songs. When teaching children, it is important to start slowly with each technique and, once confirmed, practice each session at an accelerated pace and not rush.

Conclusion

The use of breath is crucial to better singing. There are more ways to teach breathing than those described by the author. The researcher has elaborated on the methods most commonly used in teaching. Singing is a subject that cannot be programmed and requires a lot of observation and adjustment by the teacher to get better results.

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