

Discuss on the Handling of Performance Details in Singing Teaching in Primary School

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Abstract: To address the common problem of students lacking emotion and appearing stiff during vocal performances in elementary schools, this article studies the methods of handling details in elementary school vocal performance teaching based on the national curriculum for vocal education and through multiple teaching cases. The research includes: (1) how to integrate performance into singing through external expression, (2) how to integrate emotion into singing through internal feeling, and (3) how to synchronize external expression and internal emotion to achieve a unified performance. The results show that through training in vocal performance details, elementary school students can exhibit dynamic expressions, vivid emotions, and excellent form during their performances. These teaching methods are essential in helping students grasp basic performance techniques, understand the content of the work, stimulate their interest in singing, and improve their vocal abilities.

1. Introduction

Vocal education is crucial in teaching music to elementary school students[1]. To achieve ideal vocal performance, students need to master accurate intonation and rhythm, natural and unified tone quality and timbre, as well as expressive facial expressions and appropriate performance. Unfortunately, singing lessons in reality teachers often focus on students singing performances rather than truly mastering singing skills. Teachers only aim to avoid mistakes in intonation, rhythm, lyrics, and so on, and often neglect the importance of expression and performance in singing. As a result, students may be able to sing songs for performances, but they can't really sing them well. Their singing lacks emotion, variety, and expression, and they don't use their facial expressions and body movements to enhance their performance. However, some teachers have realized the shortcomings of this approach and have tried to improve their teaching strategies. For example, they add performance actions to the singing lessons, which can stimulate students' enthusiasm for singing. Alternatively, they focus on improving the overall tone quality of the class, which enhances the overall aesthetic. Through these efforts, students can now sing songs in unison with accurate intonation, unified tone quality, and appropriate strength, even when the songs are challenging choral works. However, during performances, students still show sing in a mechanical and rigid way, without expression, and without aesthetic appeal. They rarely sing the songs they learned in

music class outside of class because they view singing as a task to complete, rather than an enjoyable experience. So, what can teachers do to restore the beauty of music and bring the joy of singing to their students?

In fact, the lack of emotional expression in music education and performance has long been a concern among professionals in the industry. Alexey Vladimirovich Kolobanov [2] introduced the emotional injection process in the singing process of children's choirs, from their origin and inheritance. James E. Sanders [3] shared the emotional experience of high school students performing in American high school choirs, and explained how students can enjoy music and improve their musical abilities. Suvi Saarikallio [4] believed that music plays a role in regulating children's emotions and that guidance from teachers and parents is essential to enhancing children's musical experiences. Qiang Long [5] suggested that music education is a very important means of promoting children's personality development, and that interaction between the external environment and the child is particularly important. Jing Wu [6] believed that music education is an important part of early childhood education, cultivating children's moral and aesthetic abilities, nurturing their emotions, and improving their learning quality. Lili Fu [7] explained the importance of emotional education in vocal performance education, exploring how to integrate emotional education into vocal education, the connotation of emotional expression in singing, and the resulting aesthetic experience. When singers infuse their performances with emotion, their voices become richer and more expressive, creating an aesthetic experience that showcases the true artistic value of human expression. Because intense feelings play such a vital role in music, developing emotional skills is especially important in vocal education.

By exploring effective teaching methods and providing practical training, this article emphasizes the importance of helping students develop fundamental performance skills, deepen their understanding of musical works, and ignite their passion for singing. These efforts are essential for improving their overall singing abilities and have significant real-world applications.

2. Research Methods of Detail Processing in Singing Performance Teaching

To address the issues mentioned earlier, the author has tried a "blending acting with singing, from the outside in" approach, which helps students cultivate the habit of using nonverbal communication in daily classroom interactions. This, in turn, improves their ability to express themselves beyond words. By providing specialized training in eye contact, facial expressions, and body language, students are encouraged to master the fundamentals of acting. At the same time, the "blending emotion with singing, from the inside out" approach is explored to assist students in comprehending the essence of musical works and igniting their passion for learning. They are given opportunities to perform and express their own emotions based on their feelings when singing. This teaching method has significant practical value.

2.1. Blending Emotion with Singing, from the Outside in

In an effort to expedite student learning of performance techniques and equip them with fundamental performance skills, the author experimented with an unconventional approach of beginning with external aspects and progressing towards internal aspects.

(1) To integrate performance details into regular classroom routines, teachers should make "beauty" the behavioral standard in daily teaching, striving to be graceful in every gesture and action. They should not only have a pleasant and engaging singing voice, but also exhibit a friendly and approachable demeanor in the classroom. They should pay attention to the details of their body language, such as their eye contact, smiles, the way they hold a chalk, their movements towards the piano, the way they lift their head during performance, flip the pages of a book, and even the way

they casually flick their hair or motion students to stand up or sit down, all of which should be graceful and aesthetically pleasing. By creating a beautiful learning environment, students will gradually be influenced and begin to emulate the same level of elegance and poise.

(2) To encourage students to pay attention to details and develop their ability to communicate through nonverbal expressions, teachers can use nonverbal language interactions in the classroom such as eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures to complete simple interactions with students. For example, the author conducted a music teaching experiment where they remained silent from the moment students lined up at the classroom door until the beginning of voice practice. Throughout this time, the teacher's gaze was fixed on the students, and anyone who looked away became the center of attention. The experiment was successful in seven different classes ranging from third to fifth grade, with students remaining focused and attentive throughout the process.

2.2. Blending Emotion with Singing, from the Inside Out

2.2.1. Understanding the Lyrics and Inspiring Emotions

The purpose of learning lyrics is to help students become familiar with the content, emotions, and overall expressive requirements of a work, laying the foundation for practicing singing. When teaching lyrics, it is important to avoid teachers doing everything and try to let students understand the lyrics as much as possible. For words and sentences that are difficult for younger students to understand, teachers can use lively and concise language to inspire students' imagination by linking them to familiar life experiences. By grasping the emotional tone of the lyrics based on the content reflected in the lyrics, students can boldly imagine and express their own understanding and interpretation of the song, summarizing the ideas and emotions conveyed by the lyrics.

2.2.2. Analyzing the Melody and Experiencing the Emotion

Melody is the primary form and expression of the thoughts conveyed in a song, with typical artistic imagery and conveying certain emotions. In teaching singing, teachers can first start with their sense of hearing and analyze the melody. A complete melody appears several times, so students should listen to it multiple times and then discuss, analyze, and share their feelings about it. Students can draw various shapes, lines, and colors to express the melody lines, dynamics, and emotions of each phrase, thus cultivating their overall emotional experience. For more challenging melodies, teachers can slow down the tempo and demonstrate humming or incorporate visual aids and body language, such as drawing a musical score or using gestures, to analyze the melody and strengthen emotional expression and communication[8].

2.2.3. Singing Songs and Expressing Emotions

Singing a song is a great way for students to express their emotions and develop their creativity through their singing voice and body movements. Swiss musician Dalcroze proposed a theory of "eurhythmics", which advocates that students should not only learn to perceive music through hearing, but also learn to perceive the fluctuations of melody and the changes in emotions through the whole body and mind. To make the performance more expressive, in choreographing movements, some performance actions that are rich in the vitality of life can be combined with the lyrics content according to the age characteristics and life experiences of the students and applied to singing teaching.

2.3. Integration of Singing and Acting: the Coordination of Internal and External Expressions

2.3.1. Integration of Teaching Materials and Extracurricular Resources

To get all the students fully immersed in music class, teachers should consider introducing top-notch children's songs, popular tunes, and even internet hits that are dynamic, captivating, diverse, have a trendy and distinct local flavor, closely tied to the students' daily realities, and in line with the aesthetic and cognitive rules that suit their mental and physical aptitudes. Truth be told, most of the songs that students can sing along to are from cartoons, TV shows, or trendy music[9]. For instance, when teaching the Taiwanese folk song *Cloudy Day*, the students were initially singing monotonously with blank faces. To spice things up, the teacher searched for a viral video of singer Stefanie Sun's rendition of *Cloudy Day* and asked the students, "Did you know that the song her grandma taught her is actually this Taiwanese folk tune? Would you like to follow Stefanie's lead and sing the rest of the song?" Immediately, the students perked up, sang wholeheartedly, and even mimicked some of the pop stars' dance moves, their faces naturally relaxed and joyful.

The key factor that can turn students from singing a song with no interest and blank expressions, to singing it proactively, and even adding matching expressions and movements under the teacher's guidance, lies in the teacher's skill in capitalizing on students' fondness for pop music and introducing them to their favorite artists' renditions, which can yield remarkable results in teaching.

2.3.2. Integration of Presentation and Experience

(1) Inspiring individuality and self-expression. Singing is a personal act for students, and the way a song is treated is a vital aspect that highlights "individuality". As a teacher, it's crucial to provide a platform for students without making them feel like they have to "follow you" or "their peers". Therefore, teachers should encourage students to challenge themselves, their classmates, and even the teacher. For instance, when teaching the song *Every Person Holds Out One Hand*, the teacher first created a set of singing and performance movements that the whole class quickly mastered. Then the teacher asked, "Who can come up with a different set of movements?" "Would you like to come up and give it a try?" At first, they were hesitant, so the teacher prompted them: "Let's have a competition among the four groups to see who can come up with the most and most beautiful movements!" The students' enthusiasm was immediately sparked, and they presented many different versions of the movements in the end. The classroom atmosphere was lively, and the students were happy because they got to express themselves freely.

In fact, every student has their own opinions and unique insights during the learning process, which all depends on how the teacher guides them to express their feelings and ideas while embracing differences. At the beginning of this class, students were not eager to create their own movements. The teacher quickly changed tactics and adopted a group competition format to stimulate their enthusiasm for performance. Primary school students have strong team spirit and always want their team to outperform others. When the teacher issued the invitation in front of the whole class, they might have felt like just one member of a big team and were less motivated to participate. However, when the teacher narrowed down the group, their sense of responsibility emerged, and their willingness to participate increased[9].

(2) Building a display stage and experiencing the joy of success. As the psychologist Geertz said, "Nothing increases the feeling of satisfaction more than success, and nothing motivates us more to strive for success than success itself". Teachers should actively create opportunities for students to showcase their talents and provide them with the motivation to succeed, allowing them to experience the joy of singing. One way to achieve this is to hold small singing contests within the class, where every student can participate in various forms, including solos, duets, group

performances, and more. The school can also host events like “Classroom Singing”, “Children’s Day”, and “New Year’s Celebrations” to encourage students to participate. The teacher should also seize opportunities to participate in various singing competitions at the city or district level and strive to obtain performance opportunities for students at local community events or other relevant institutions. Furthermore, when television stations from the province or city come to record programs at the school, the teacher should recommend outstanding students to participate.

Participating in various activities and competitions provides students with opportunities to exercise and showcase their talents, motivating them to actively participate and continuously reap the fruits of success, gain the experience of success, and enjoy the joy of success[10].

3. Research Results

Teaching and learning singing is a joyful process where the singer must perform the piece with both emotion and melody in order to be successful. Teachers should pay attention to the emotions expressed by the students during singing, understand their psychology, personality, and habits, and transform musical emotions into vivid images. Teachers should also teach according to the students’ abilities, guiding them with patience and care. With the guidance of excellent teachers, students are not afraid of failure and setbacks and can learn and improve through various trials. Through learning and training, the entire class of students can achieve the goal of harmonious and beautiful singing, with expressive facial expressions that unify the auditory and visual aesthetic standards in the classroom.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Discussion on the Reason Why Singing Classes in the Teaching Process only Focus on Singing and not on Performance

Many music teachers, due to various reasons, interpret teaching “singing” narrowly as teaching “voice”. They focus all their energy on helping students grasp aspects such as intonation, rhythm, and unified tone, but ignore the comprehensive performance skills beyond voice, including emotions, expressions, eye contact, and movements, manifested as.

4.1.1. Teachers Only focus on Teaching Materials, and do not Prioritize Teaching Optimization

With a large amount of content in the primary school music textbook, it is impossible for teachers to achieve all teaching goals perfectly without reasonable integration.

(1) Too much content in the teaching materials, but not enough in-depth teaching. Taking the third-grade volume one of the Rymusic Edition textbook as an example, the textbook contains nine units, each unit has at least four works, and one improvisation activity, plus some time allocated for instrumental music teaching in each class. In total, each class only has around 30 lessons in one semester. In order to comprehensively implement the requirements of the textbook, many teachers choose to strictly follow the textbook and teacher’s reference book, resulting in superficial teaching in each module. The time constraint makes the later artistic processing in the “singing lesson” impossible.

(2) Diverse students, but one-size-fits-all teaching. The desire to perform in music class varies among students of different age groups. Younger students enjoy performing and expressing themselves, participating in various classroom activities, and often have rich expressions when singing songs. As students get older, they become less enthusiastic about performing, especially

during puberty when some students discover their voices have changed and become different from their classmates. In music class, they may feel shy or embarrassed, and their singing may become quieter, and they may even be afraid to sing out loud. As a result, it is difficult to achieve emotional and expressive singing. If teachers use a one-size-fits-all teaching strategy for classes with different age groups and students with different personality traits, the results can be easily predicted.

4.1.2. Teachers just focus on the Sound, not the Performance

In the limited time they have, some teachers make sure that their students can sing the songs for the concert and focus more on their singing ability. However, during class, the author has observed that some students in every class have a strong desire to perform but unfortunately lack guidance on how to do so, which is a real shame.

4.2. Why is it that Teachers Can Achieve Better Teaching Results When They don't Speak?

Comparing two teaching methods - one where the teacher speaks and the other where the teacher doesn't - the former requires students to rely only on their ears to understand the teacher's instructions, whereas the latter requires students to focus more on the teacher and use their eyes to understand the instructions. This increased focus from the students has led to good results in both their participation and vocal practice. What's more important is that students have learned to observe the subtle changes in the teacher's gaze and adjust their behavior accordingly. This relaxed yet effective method of communication will continue to be experimented with by the author, and will be continuously improved upon to make it a normal part of classroom teaching.

4.3. The Way to Make Teachers' Expressions "Speak"

Teachers with rich facial expressions are not only more efficient but also more popular with students when it comes to teaching. In music classes, facial expressions are also a way for teachers and students to communicate with each other.

For instance, during a class-wide singing session, the author conducted while using facial expressions such as smiling or frowning to express approval or disapproval of the singing. The students could quickly adjust their voices based on these expressions. If the singing was too loud, the author slightly lowered his head, tucked in his chin, and made a "shh" gesture with his mouth, causing the overall sound of the class to lower. Similarly, when the students were about to hit a high note, the author raised his eyebrows in advance to indicate that the students should focus on their pitch, leading to immediate improvements in the class's performance.

The above example is one that many music teachers can relate to. In some public classes, teachers use similar techniques to guide their students during class-wide singing sessions, using facial expressions to indicate approval or disapproval of the singing. However, the crucial factor is whether the teacher is consciously using this method to help students accumulate experience in expressing themselves, and whether they are intentionally guiding students to respond with facial expressions in order to prepare them for singing with expression.

4.4. How to Integrate Special Training into Students' Habits

4.4.1. Eye Training

The saying goes, "a performer's entire act is in their face, and a face's entire act is in their eyes", which shows the importance of the expressiveness and depth conveyed through the eyes. Eye training includes exercises such as "moving left and right, moving up and down, focusing, looking far away, and looking up close". When training the eyes, it is important to have a clear mental

image and a focused expression in order to create a vivid performance. To achieve this, the author has designed some games and activities to explore in elementary school music classes.

For example, the teacher can designate 3, 6, or 9 points at different locations on the blackboard (top, middle, bottom, left, right, etc.) and ask the students to quickly or slowly move their eyes from one point to another according to the teacher's instructions, which can involve connecting or disconnecting the points, or drawing lines in different directions. The exercise can start off slow and gradually increase in speed, as well as start off with simpler patterns and progress to more complex ones.

4.4.2. Expression Training

The eyes, mouth, eyebrows, face, and nose are all tools for expressing emotions through the face. For example, different movements of the mouth, such as opening, closing, curling up, and pursing, can express different emotions. Similarly, different styles of eyebrow movements, such as bending, furrowing, raising, and lowering, can also express different feelings. The muscles in the cheeks, whether sinking or lifting, tight or loose, can also convey different moods. If music teachers can help students use these tools to express their emotions, then they don't have to worry about their students' facial expressions being bland.

For instance, the teacher can play an accompaniment and have the students sing along while also making exaggerated facial expressions, which can help to reinforce the performance aspect of singing. This is similar to how many music teachers use "inner singing" to help students establish a sense of intonation, rhythm, and lyrics when learning a new song. In this case, the aim is to develop an "inner vision" for the students, so that they can focus some of their attention on the visual aspects of their performance. This exercise is best done in a classroom with mirrors or in pairs, so that students can observe and learn from each other.

4.4.3. Gestures and Other Physical Training

Gestures are a "silent language" of human beings. In vocal performance, there are several commonly used hand gestures such as "leading, setting, opening, closing, supporting, and shifting", each of which can express one or several emotions. These gestures are all "dynamic", and require smooth transitions between finger, wrist, and arm movements. Therefore, teachers need to train students to be proficient in using these gestures, so that during singing, the gestures can be used to express emotions in accordance with the content and needs of the song. This requires the eyes to follow the hands, the hands to point, being relaxed but not slack, being tense but not stiff, and having a clear distinction between fast and slow, as well as between rigid and flexible. Only then can hand movements become a form of "language" to assist vocal performance.

4.5. Gesture Training

4.5.1. Eyes Follow the Hands

The teacher marks three points on the top of the board in front of the classroom, indicating left, center, and right. The students are asked to point to a specific point using one hand according to the teacher's instruction. At the same time, their eyes should follow the direction of the pointing finger, and when the finger moves to another point, the eyes should also look in that direction. This exercise can be done in two forms: point-to-point or tracing lines between the points.

For example, the song *Ship-Shaking* has a beautiful melody and a small vocal range, so students enjoy singing it and can usually sing it well. To enhance the performance, the teacher designed a lesson plan that included four hand gestures: "up in the sky", "by the river", "on the street", and

“right in front of you”. The gestures were arranged from far to near and from high to low. The students quickly learned the gestures and when they sang the song with the gestures, it was clear that the visual, physical, and emotional expression made the performance more beautiful and the sound quality improved significantly. The integration of audio and visual elements made the singing class “come alive” in an instant.

In fact, the teacher only added four simple hand gestures compared to previous classes. However, the artistic effect was greatly enhanced. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, the four gestures made the students more aware of their performance. Secondly, these four gestures happened to match the melody’s ups and downs. Lastly, the students knew that the teacher was not just listening to their singing, but also paying attention to their expressions and movements. This is why such a fantastic audiovisual effect was achieved.

4.5.2. Rhythmic Training

This training, also known as “dancing to music”, involves the teacher playing music clips with different emotional tones, and students spontaneously expressing themselves through body movements. Initially, the teacher may lead the training in the middle, but gradually encourages students to use their own movements to perform.

4.5.3. Training without Physical Objects

It refers to the performer’s use of imagination to make hypothetical movements without any props. This training of expressing imaginary situations through movements is highly favored by students. Whether it is practiced alone or combined with singing, they are all enthusiastic about participating.

5. Conclusion

In teaching activities, emotions play a crucial role in eliciting, directing, motivating, and reinforcing student participation and internalization, and have a direct impact on the success of teaching activities and act as a catalyst for teaching success. The new curriculum standard [11] places enriching students’ emotional experience at the forefront of its objectives and points out that through music learning, students’ emotional world can be influenced and cultivated, gradually establishing a deep affection for family, others, humanity, and all things beautiful, thereby fostering a positive and optimistic attitude towards life and a pursuit of a beautiful future. Thus, emotional teaching is a focal point in music education. The process of emotional teaching coexists with teaching lyrics, analyzing melodies, and singing songs, complementing and permeating throughout singing teaching. Research on the teaching methods mentioned above is of significant applied value in helping students master basic performance methods, understand the content of works, stimulate singing interests, and improve singing abilities.

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