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Project Title

An exploratory document analysis of the four main pediatric vocal pedagogy (“PVP”) manuals available in the US published over the last fifteen years (2008-2023) to determine 1) which manual presents the most comprehensive systematic vocal instruction (“SVI”) and 2) what techniques would benefit my own practice.



Practitioner Context

- ❑ Private voice teacher in a conservatory setting.
- ❑ Teaching voice for over ten years, mainly to children ages 3-12.
- ❑ Trained Suzuki Voice teacher and studied with Suzuki Voice founder, Päivi Kukkamäki, in Finland.

Definitions and Abbreviations

Pediatric vocal pedagogy (“PVP”) = practice of teaching voice to pre-pubescent children.

Systematic Vocal Instruction (“SVI”) = developing the voice as an *instrument* through the methodological implementation of vocal *exercises* prior to the introduction of songs (Phillips, 2014).

SVI Manuals Analyzed

Teaching the
Child Singer
(Lentini, 2020)

The Full Voice
Teacher Guide
(Loney, 2018)

Teaching Kids to
Sing
(Phillips, 2014)

Singing Lessons
for Little Singers
(Blankenbeler,
2009)



Why Teach Children to Sing?

Singing is a complex, *learned* skill that requires the coordination of psychological and motor processes. It takes time to develop so instruction must begin early in childhood. (Phillips, 2014)

Project Overview



Key Research Questions



Justification and Contextualization



Methodology and Methods



Ethics and Insider Research

Key Research Questions



WHAT REPRESENTS THE MOST
COMPREHENSIVE PVP SVI MANUAL
IN THE US?



WHAT TECHNIQUES CAN I
IMPLEMENT INTO MY OWN
PRACTICE AS A VOICE TEACHER?

Justification and Contextualization

“Acutely aware of the physical damage improper, excessive, or ill-advised singing can cause, the Academy in the past has recommended that children not engage in formal voice studies. However, upon further investigation, no scientific, pedagogical, or physiological evidence indicates that child voice pedagogy is inherently harmful to children’s bodies, minds or spirits...[and that] there are benefits to teaching children to sing.”

(American Academy of Teachers of Singing, 2002, p. 1, emphasis added)

Justification for Study

Teaching children to sing improves their **social identity** (Welch et al., 2018), overall **musical ability, confidence, and ongoing interest in music.**
(Demorest, Nichols and Pfordresher, 2018)



But the lack of “consensus on what teaching young singers entails” has contributed to a lack of confidence by singing teachers to proceed “responsibly and effectively.”
(Skelton, 2007, p. 537)



Teaching children to sing has been one of the most “controversial facets of vocal pedagogy” which many voice teachers have found to be “intimidating and forbidding terrain” (Berg, 2009, p. 387).

What caused the lack of literature and consensus on PVP?



Followers of John Dewey advocated for a more child-centered approach which meant using more aesthetically pleasing songs (as opposed to exercises) to teach children how to sing (Phillips, 2014).



During the 20th century children were taught *songs* but not *how to sing* leading to the belief that some children were simply innately talented singers and others were not (Atterbury, 1984; Phillips, 1992, 2014; McCarry, 2003; Berg, 2009; Lentini, 2020).

Ethics and Insider Research

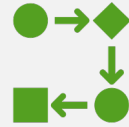
Although my study did not directly involve children, implementing techniques from this study into my practice would involve children and thus required me to be vigilant about keeping their best interests in the forefront of my mind.

I used an “ethics of care framework” (Toy-Cronin in Bulk and Collins, 2023) to acknowledge the power imbalance between myself and my students and necessity to weigh the implementation of new techniques and methods in my practice with the needs of my students.

Being an insider affords me a greater knowledge of subject matter (Bonner and Tolhurst in Unluer, 2012) but can prevent me from seeing “all dimensions of the bigger picture” (Unluer, 2012, p.6).

Mitigation of potential bias: Reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983) reflective research journal; search log and coding chart; two document assessment charts.

Methodology



Pragmatic and interpretive subjectivist perspective.



Conducted an inductive, qualitative, grounded theory document analysis of the four current US PVP SVI texts.



Used “phrases or terms used by the participants themselves” (the texts) to “give voice to the data” and determine the codes and subsequent categories for comparison (Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019, p. 263).

Methods

Reflective Journal, memo writing, literature review.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria (PVP-specific, outlining an SVI method).

Data search centered around variations of “teaching children to sing.”

Obtained all relevant texts; excluded those who did not meet criteria.

Conducted coding: three-tiered, co-evolving coding process: open, axial, and then selective (Denscombe, 2014; Saldaña, 2016).

Likert (1932) scale of 1-5.

Document Assessment Chart (adapted from Bowen, 2009, and Kridel in Morgan, 2022) to examine these “grey” literature manuals.



Findings

Likert (1932) Scale

Author	Size	Price	Availability	Accessibility	Depth	Layout	Up-to-date	Score/ Avg
Lentini (2020)	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Loney (2018)	5	4	5	3	3	2	4	3.3
Phillips (2014)	2	1	1	1	5	4	3	2.4
Blankenbehler (2009)	5	5	5	5	3	4	2	4.1

- ▶ To detach from my insider perspective, I used simple, descriptive words to create a 1-5 scale to first evaluate the SVI manuals.
- ▶ Letini's (2020) 127-page manual rated highest and Blankebehler's (2009) 41-page book came in second place.

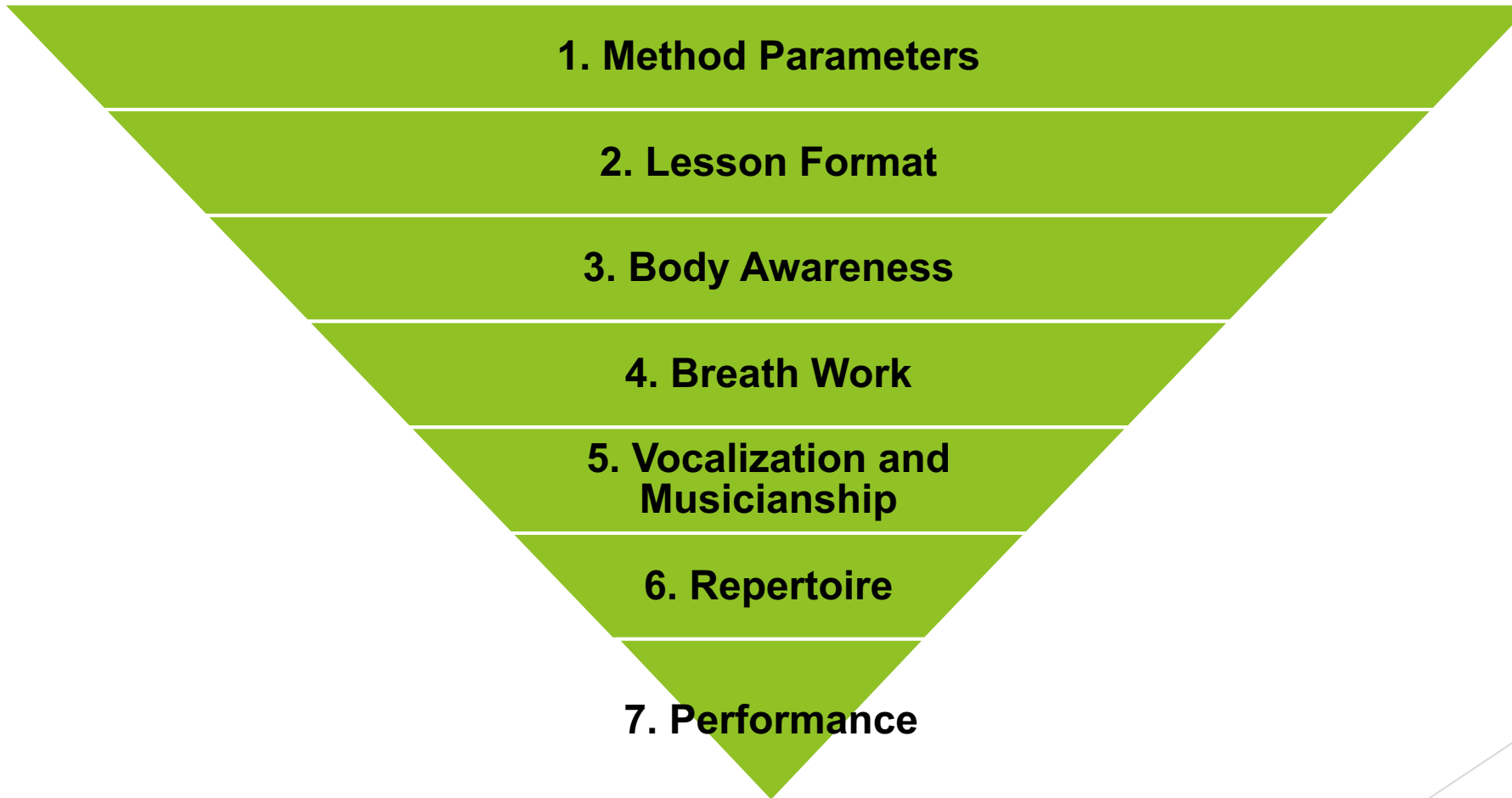
Phillips (2014) is out of print, hard to locate and prohibitively expensive at over \$150.

“Grey” Literature Document Assessment

- ❑ Lentini (2020) and Phillips (2014): **trained vocal pedagogy specialists**; formally published; contained structural **foundational materials** and **outlined variations** for the method based on different **age group levels**.
- ❑ Lentini’s (2020) text was **succinct, well-organized, easy to follow, understand, and implement**. Reviews of this text confirmed this analysis
- ❑ Phillips’ (2014) text was **foundationally rigorous and well-organized** but the 200 pages (ch 9-12) for method were daunting.

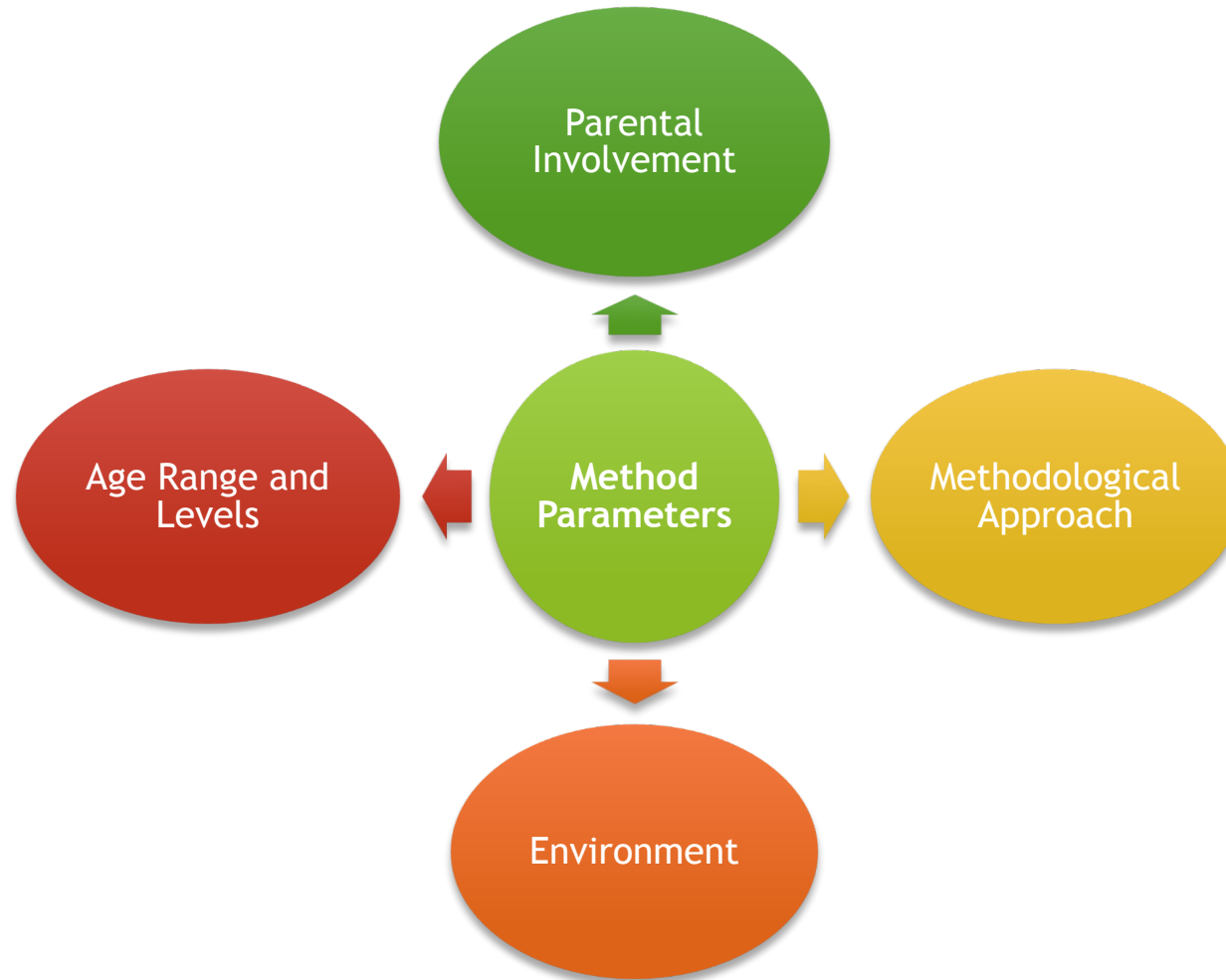
Attainability	Experienced, Knowledgeable PVP Practitioner?	Relevance and Scope
Content Fits Conceptual Framework?	Authenticity	Credibility
Accuracy	Representativeness	Complete, Comprehensive or Selective
Succinctness	Organization and Depth of Content	Balanced/Uneven
Original Purpose	Targeted Audience	First-hand/Second-hand
Edited/Unedited		Index for Ease of Reference

Comparable Categories



Area of concern in study: setting up false equivalency.

(#1) Method Parameters



(#1) Method Parameters: Age Levels

Lentini (2020)

Three levels, ages 5-13:
Discover (5-7)
Learn (8-10)
Grow (11-13)

Vocal Pedagogue
Perspective.

“Journey of Sound”

Loney (2020)

Flexible method for
ages 5-12.

Music teacher perspective.

Phillips (2014)

Two levels of 80 exercises
for ages 7-17:

Level I: beginner (7+);
Level II: intermediate-
advanced (8-17); sublevels

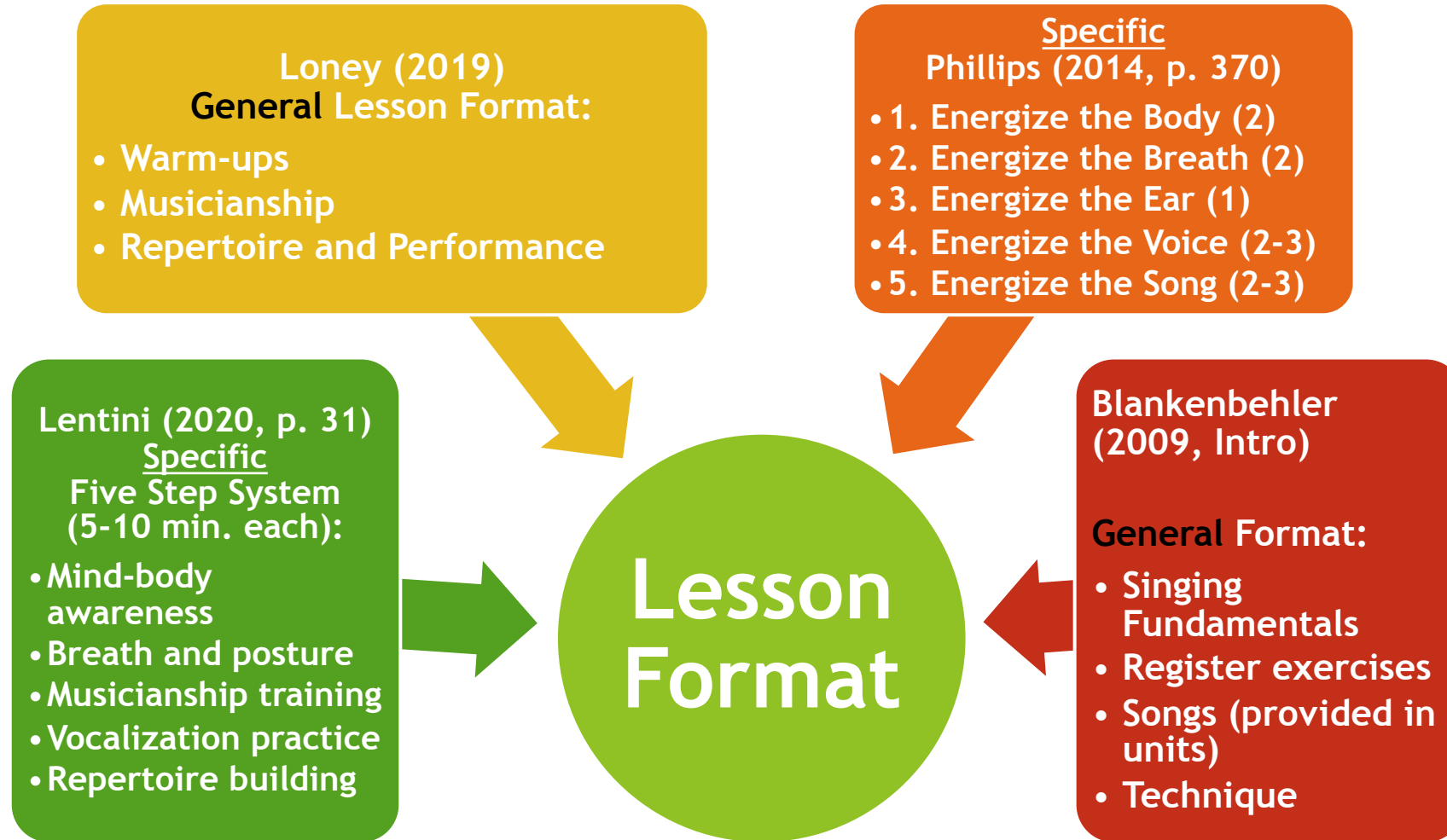
Vocal Pedagogue
perspective.

Blankenbehler (2009)
ages 5-9:

Units I-XI: songs and
exercises based on a scales
and intervals.

**Student/parent/teacher
perspective.**

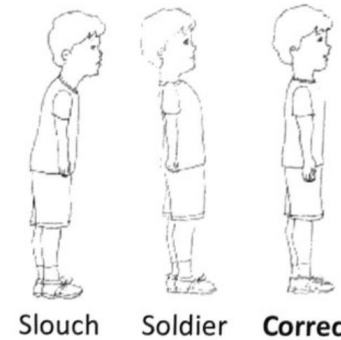
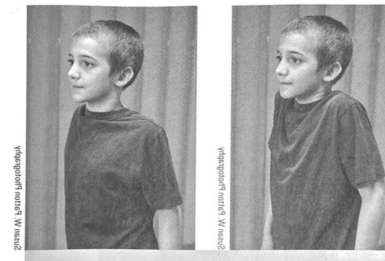
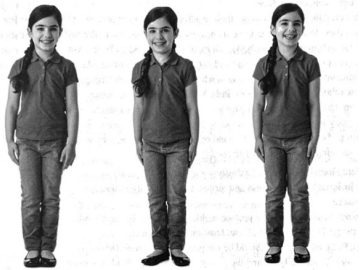
(#2) Lesson Format



Lesson Format and Overall Content Comparison

Method	Specifies Exact Lesson Format	Employs Solfege & Curwen Hand Signals	Uses Props	Addresses Piano Involvement in Lesson	Provides Student Evaluation Forms
Born2Sing (Lentini, 2020)					
Full Voice (Loney, 2018)					
TKTS (Phillips, 2014)					
SLLS (Blankenbeler, 2009)					

(#3) Body Awareness



Loney (2018)

"movement activities
that bring awareness
to the body" (2019)
Play-based learning.

Phillips (2014)

Provides 30 pages of
photos with detailed
instructions for
"energizing" exercises
and stretches.

Lentini (2020)

Photos and detailed
instructions of stretches.
Standing for spinal
awareness/posture/poise
and seated/lying down for
guided meditations and
focus.

Blankenbehler
(2009)

Provides four
illustrated exercises:
stretching,
flexibility and mind-
body awareness with
child-friendly
instructions.

Body
Awareness
Exercises

Shoulders Away from Ears!

Body Awareness Comparison

Method	Provides Photos or Illustrations	Provides Descriptions	Uses Props	Emphasizes Importance of Posture
Born2Sing (Lentini, 2020)				
Full Voice (Loney, 2018)				
TKTS (Phillips, 2014)				
SLLS (Blankenbeler, 2009)				

(#4) Breath Work



Lentini (2020)

Two sets of **horizontal** and **vertical** exercises for D/L/G along with suggestions of props.

Loney (2018)

Does not specify exercises.
Advocates using favorite vocalization exercise 3-4x to create a breathing exercise.

Phillips (2014)

Photos with instructions of h/v exercises: breathing motion, breath support, breath control and breath management; breath-centered vocalises (Cherubini; Purcell); recommends props.

Blankenbehler (2009)

Illustrations alongside instructions of four exercises.
Not intuitive; dated; lack of accurate language; potentially confusing.

Breath Work Comparison Chart

Method	Provides Photos or Illustrations	Provides Instructions	Uses Props	Emphasizes Importance of Posture	Uses Vocalises
Born2Sing (Lentini, 2020)					
Full Voice (Loney, 2018)					
TKTS (Phillips, 2014)					
SLLS (Blankenbehler, 2009)					

(#5) Vocalization and Musicianship

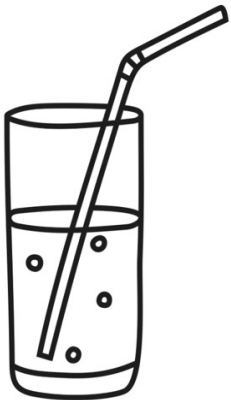
Lentini (2020)



Head/chest voice
to mixed voice
exploration.

Use of Italian Vowel
Sounds @ 5th.
Gentle intro to
belting.

SOVT exercises.



Full Voice Workbooks.
Call/response for
pitch/rhythm, solfege,
intervals & rounds, four-bar
sight singing with solfege
and rhythm notation.



Discover/Learn/Grow

Vocalization and Musicianship

Loney (2018)

Problems:

Lack of clear vocalization guidance.
Focused outside of singing instrument (workbook).

Student-Centered

Vowel modification
(p. 40):

Use student/friend names.
Explore "good"/"bad" vowel sounds.
Have vowel of the day to explore in
tech exercises and repertoire.

Vocal exercises
(P. 40-1):

Vary exercises: put fermata on highest
note change tempo or sing exercise
backwards.
Use arpeggio scales (major/minor) to
encourage active listening.

Engage student (p. 40):

Ask student for input on how to make
exercise more challenging.
Explain purpose for exercise to
educate student.
Identify exercises (scale, triad, tone,
semitones, etc.) to increase music
theory Knowledge.

Music theory
(writing, reading, and sight-singing
music):
Full Voice Workbooks during lesson.

Theory Workbooks

Vocalization and Musicianship Phillips (2014)

Energize the Ear (#3):
Pitch perception (hi/low; major/minor,
tuning).

Pitch discrimination (intervals).

Tonal memory (by echo-singing).

Tonal patterns in songs.

Energize the Voice (#4):

Register coordination & inflection games.
Spoken recitations & vocalises for tone &
diphthong production.

Solfege hand gestures to explore tonal
patterns.

Jaw/throat/tongue exercises to free
vocal tract.

Audiation

Students: (listen) (think) (sing)
Loo loo loo loo

Teacher: Loo loo loo loo
(listen) (think) (sing)
Loo loo loo loo etc.

EXAMPLE 10.5. Vocalise: Echo patterns.

Vocalization and Musicianship

Blankenbehler (2009)

Intervals

Initial exercises in Unit 1:
high/low voice navigation
using humming or "ah";
siren; solfege scale.

Each unit contains
technique page:
vowel shape & production;
tongue, mouth, throat
position; legato singing &
diphthong combinations.

Problems:

Larger intervals too big
for young children.

Do young children know
how to hum?

Unclear vowel sounds
and directions.

Vocalization centers
around interval focus for
each unit.

Thirds are Skips:



Positives:

Step-wise
progression.

Small intervals
and mnemonic
devices.

Method	Provides Photos or Illustrations	Provides Instructions	Uses Props and/or Workbooks	Uses Vocalises
Born2Sing (Lentini, 2020)				
Full Voice (Loney, 2018)				
TKTS (Phillips, 2014)				
SLLS (Blankenbehler, 2009)				

Vocalization and Musicianship Comparison Chart

(#6) Repertoire

Lentini (2020)

Guidelines for choosing songs, learning songs, singing with expression, memorizing and performing, and appropriate repertoire.

Repertoire book suggestions D/L/G.

Phillips (2014)

"Energize the Song" (Levels I and II)
Provides and dissects classical songs (Brahms, Mozart, Billings, Franck) to teach diction, expression, phrasing.

Does not provide solo repertoire suggestions.

Loney (2018)

Assess and assign.

Repertoire with a purpose.

Give fun "teaser" about new song.

Read lyrics aloud, teach melody/lyrics in call/response method.

Repertoire book suggestions.

Blankenbeler (2009)

Simple interval-based songs provided.

Suggestions for additional songs for each unit

Short list of repertoire books in introduction.

Rapid Articulation
Tongue Twisters
Tell the Story First

Repertoire Comparison

Method	Provides Repertoire Pieces in Manual	Provides Solo Repertoire Lists/Suggestions	Employs Tongue Twisters for Diction and Articulation	Separates text from music to teach repertoire
Born2Sing (Lentini, 2020)				
Full Voice (Loney, 2018)				
TKTS (Phillips, 2014)				
SLLS (Blankenbeler, 2009)				

(#7) Performance

Lentini (2020)

Different Levels of Preparation for Opportunities (Ch. 12):

In-Studio performances for shyer students, studio recitals, auditions, and competitions.

Lentini (2020) (p. 52-3)

Performance Prep Tips

Employ muscle memory; utilize audiation and storytelling/imagination; identify focal point; mock-performance prior to event; focus on experience rather than outcome.

Loney

"Celebrate student efforts with a fun in-lesson recital for parents" (2019, p. 2).

Does not address performance.

Blankenbeler (2009, p. 40)

Evaluate performance-readiness.

Practice and Prepare: memorize song and practice performance for parents

Play pretend: act out song with appropriate gestures/expressions.

Phillips (2014)

Goal of lessons is to sing w/ good diction and "expressive interpretation" (p. 219).

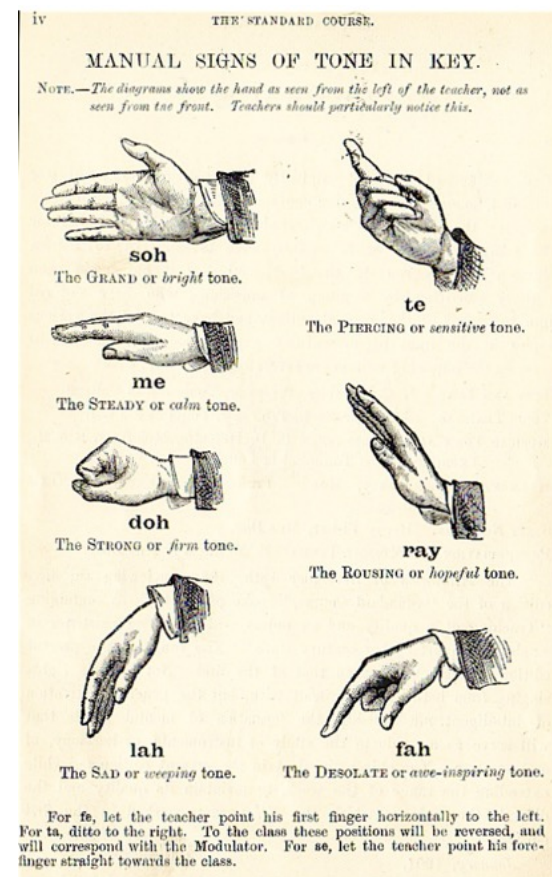
Does not address performance.

Performance Comparison

Method	Discusses Performance Preparation Techniques	Discusses Different Performance Opportunities
Born2Sing (Lentini, 2020)		
Full Voice (Loney, 2018)		
TKTS (Phillips, 2014)		
SLLS (Blankenbehler, 2009)		

What Stands Out from Analysis?

- ▶ Use of Solfege and/or Curwen-Kodaly Hand Signals
- ▶ Interval method (Blankenbehler, 2009)
- ▶ Numerous vocalises created around syllables and solfege (Phillips, 2014)
- ▶ Use of Props (Phillips, 2014; Lentini, 2020)
- ▶ Storytelling to explore head/chest voice (Phillips, 2014; Lentini, 2020)
- ▶ Use of tongue twisters to practice diction and articulation (Phillips, 2014; Loney, 2018; Lentini, 2020;).



(Curwen, 1884, p. viii)

Final Analysis

- ▶ Lentini (2020) and Phillips (2014) were the most rigorous and detailed in approach, scope and the details regarding a PVP methodology.
- ▶ Lentini (2020) distills how to teach an SVI vocal method to children of three separate levels (D/L/G) in a clear, well-formatted manner; includes helpful forms for teachers, and is inventive in her use of props. Lacks an appendix and glossary.
- ▶ Phillips' (2014) book eclipses in its foundational depth and breadth but its complexity and comprehensiveness make it a challenge to digest and implement; lacks a discussion on performance and flash cards for ease of implementation.
- ▶ Blankenbeler's (2009) simple songs and exercises based around musical intervals are initially a good idea until larger intervals arrive in later units. Geared towards child reader rather than vocal pedagogue; simplistic.
- ▶ Loney's (2018) manual focuses mainly on music theory, not on how to teach singing. Focuses on the business side of teaching music and heavily on group classes.

Conclusions and Recommendations



Recommendations

- ▶ Increased education regarding PVP for practitioners in singing associations and in vocal pedagogy programs at universities to further reinforce that singing is a learned skill and should be taught early in childhood (Phillips, 2014).
- ▶ Online availability of Phillips' (2014) text which is very hard to locate and prohibitively expensive for the average practitioner.
- ▶ Printable flash cards for Phillips' (2014) text, like those available with the first edition (1992),

Outcome of Study: Implementation of Techniques in my Practice

- ❑ Solfege: CK hand signs paired with Blankenbeler's (2009) mnemonic interval phrases and simple songs, as well as use of Lentini's (2020) step-bell techniques for enhanced visual learning;
- ❑ Tongue Twister warm-ups for diction and articulation as part of repertoire studies;
- ❑ Use of storytelling and roles to explore use of head/chest voice;
- ❑ Speaking the text of a song prior to singing it; focus more on telling the story;
- ❑ Increased use of props for breath work and vocalization;
- ❑ Gently introduce belting using Lentini's (2020) exercises to my older students who need guidance in this type of singing.
- ❑ Create and implement use of an evaluation form to give to the parents/guardians of my students to reinforce the fact that singing is a learned skill and to keep parents aware of their child's progress.

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