



## **Singing for Every Child**

by **Judy Suvak**

Some children enter school having had little experience in singing. Quite a few children sing in a speaking or shouting voice. When I suggest helping children find the singing voice, I refer to a light, high, head voice often associated with the sound of an excellent children's choir.

A priority in my work is helping children find and use their singing voices.

Singing is at the core of our music curriculum, and I am confident that acquiring the skill of singing has lasting value for children and adults.

Several years ago with the grade two classes in our school, I chose to concentrate on voice-building throughout the entire school year. The reason for choosing this grade was that children of that age seem to be open to exploration and are able to be somewhat analytical about their voices. During kindergarten and grade one music classes, these children had experienced lots of singing, teacher modeling, vocal exploration, playing folk song games, and reminders to use breath energy. We listened to good singing and discussed voice changes.

Second grade seemed a good time to intensify vocal study.

The results of the children's study exceeded my fondest dreams. Nearly every child was successful in experiencing the joy of beautiful singing. The children who were previously able to sing well improved immensely in confidence and voice quality. However, it was those often referred to as non-singers that amazed and delighted all of us who studied together. Spontaneous applause often erupted when a child used a singing quality for the first time. The child who sang was pleased.

Since then, I have continued to search for ways to help children find and use their singing voices. Presented in this article are some of those ways. Although the experiences mentioned seem to be in an order, we actually did many things most of the time. During every class, we sang, played singing games, listened, and explored and experimented with our voices.

## Vocal Models

When speaking, I tried to consistently use a light, clear, pleasant, fairly high-pitched quality. I sang in a light head voice with little vibrato. I continually monitored my own and the children's voice.

I knew from experience that many boys believe their voices are lower than those of girls. I made a tape of several boys and girls in our school who sang well. They sang a short, simple song using pitches between treble clef second line G and fifth line F. When listening to the tape, the students sometimes tried to figure out if a boy or girl was singing. Unless they recognized the voice, they did not know. They began to realize that the voices of boys and girls are much the same and they were hearing the kinds of voices I want them to develop.

We listened often to excellent children's(boy) choirs and soloists. I showed a picture of the boy singers to convince some young gentlemen that these voices were indeed those of boys. For this study we stayed away from pop singers of any kind, listening to both trained and untrained voices in what might be called a classical style.

There were also children who thought they could not sing. To build positive attitudes toward singing, I tried to consistently give these messages:

- Singing is enjoyable.
- Each of us is at a different stage in our understanding and development.
- All of us have something to learn.
- It is necessary to practice in order to improve.
- We value each student and his or her contribution.

## Vocal Exploration

**Folk Song Games:** I endeavored to keep all voice study an enjoyable experience. The movement, social interaction, and fun experienced in the thoughtful and careful playing of a folk song game helped build a climate of trust and playfulness. These activities created a most desirable setting for study of the voice.

Much vocal exploring was done before, during, or after playing a folk song game. For example if we were playing The Farmer in the Dell, we spoke Heigh ho the derry o using a light speaking voice. We varied the pitch using mostly high and very high pitches. Sometimes we sang a phrase two or more times within the song, e.g., The Farmer in the Dell, The Farmer in the Dell, Heigh ho the derry o, Heigh ho the derry o, Heigh ho the derry, The Farmer in the Dell.

I reminded children to send air to support their voices; sometimes by indicating the position of my own abdominal muscles. We often used big arm gestures as we spoke. During the playing of a game, I changed the pitch of the song but most of the time, kept the tessitura fairly high. Keeping pitches within the treble staff is a good guideline.

We played folk song games that call for individual response such as The Pumpkin Child on page 6 of this publication.