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## The Development of Voice Competences of Undergraduate Students in the Study Programme of Preschool and Elementary Pedagogy

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Ars inter Culturas nr 4, 89-97

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2015

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach  
dozwolonego użytku.

**Original research paper**

Received: 29.01.2015

Accepted: 15.12.2015

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Slovak Republic**THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOICE COMPETENCES  
OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE STUDY PROGRAMME  
OF PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY PEDAGOGY**

Key words: *student of preschool and elementary pedagogy, voice development, voice competences, music activities, external and internal factors limiting voice development*

**Introduction**

As each person's voice is a singing activity connected with the life, individual development and rich scale of various activities belonging to a particular person. Then singing as a physiological capacity belonging to a particular individual, thanks to its easy realisation and availability, has a wide array of social and educational application.

Singing is the bearer of a number of different functions, e.g. communicative, educational, aesthetic, psychological, therapeutic, social, and the function connected with health. It develops analytical differentiation ability of the auditory organ, musical thinking, musical imagination, motor skills of voice, breath and articulatory organs, but it also supports focus attention and increases its scope and duration. Singing is a creative activity that involves mental activity of the performer – his or her emotional and also rational dispositions. It is “[...] a more complex and holistic creativity than unilaterally focused rational or technical creativity [...]”<sup>1</sup>.

**1 Some External Factors Limiting the Voice Preparation of Early Education and Primary School Teachers**

Cultivated voice speech is an essential condition for a high quality performance within teaching profession itself. Thus it is possible to understand by the development of voice competences in pre-gradual preparation, a key competence for life-long pedagogical practice. If we understand by the concept *competency*, “[...] behaviour, action or set of actions that are characterized by excellent performance in any

<sup>1</sup> J. Raninec, *Ludský hlas a jeho kultivovanie*, Bratislava 2003, p. 118.

field of activity [...]”<sup>2</sup>, then each pedagogue should be able to control his/her voice in colloquial speech, and finally each pre-primary and primary teacher should be able to sing in an aesthetic and cultivated way. Seeing that in children at this stage of learning proper speech and singing, habits are being formed, while an educator is an important voice pattern for them. It means that they will imitate his/her voice quality, no matter whether in speech or singing.

The particularity of music education is the development of musical abilities and skills in practical school teaching. Then it is important for a teacher to “[...] develop artistic abilities of pupils and students, and a teacher should have command of certain artistic skills”<sup>3</sup>. Various reductions, so called “standards” for students, certain standard of contact hours, or overall view to the preparation of teachers in the study field of Preschool and Elementary Pedagogy and social-scientific disciplines as outer factors, have a significant impact on the design of curricula for a particular faculty.

At the Faculty of Education, Catholic University in Ružomberok, the music professors focus on the practical development of voice competences of future music teachers for the Bachelor study programme of Preschool and Elementary Pedagogy, in the obligatory subject Singing and Voice Education, during two semesters. Time subsidy of the subject is one 45 minute lesson a week. In the third semester of the study, the subject is optional with the same time subsidy. The education of students is in groups<sup>4</sup>.

After the new accreditation there is a need of practical development of undergraduate students’ voice competences introduced in obligatory-optional subject of Voice Education in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> semesters of the undergraduate Bachelor study. Despite the disturbed continuity of the subject, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester there is increased the time subsidy (2 classes per week) and also the number of credits in the subject of Voice Education after students successfully complete it. The group form of education is not changed, despite there are several negative aspects that should be taken into consideration. In the following lines we introduce some of its positive aspects:

- As many students did not obtain a diploma from elementary music education and they cannot play any musical instruments, the classes focus mainly on the aspect of creating certain repertoire of folk and classical songs for children which undergraduate students have to master in the practice.
- Group character of seminars offers students greater time space for training singing, faster headway in singing, and the improvement of voice condition.
- It is generally known that vocal cords are the most sensitive muscles of the human body and they are in close communication with affective behaviour of human beings. During the collective/group singing there occurs so called myo-transfer, or resonant transmission of electromagnetic energies between vocal cords of the singers standing near each other<sup>5</sup>.
- Group singing is especially enjoyed by children who intuitively feel its magic. Group form of voice education and singing enables students acquire some practical didactic skills.

<sup>2</sup> I. Turek, *Inovácie v didaktike*, Bratislava 2005, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Z. Zahradníková, *Význam rozvíjania interpretačných zručností v procese vzdelávania a výchovy budúcich učiteľov hudby*, [in:] *Tradice a súčasnosť vzdelávania učiteľů hudby a hudební výchovy*, sborník z 31. muzikologické konference Janáčkiana 2012, Ostrava 2012, p. 254.

<sup>4</sup> Note: Six students – per one teaching unit.

<sup>5</sup> Compare with V. Marek, *Tajné dejiny hudby*, Praha 2000, p. 45.

- In the field of music headway it is important to mention the impact of a group on the formation of musical taste and value orientation, the improved quality of some analytic and synthetic musical abilities of children, that are closely connected with solo singing, and also with group singing, and finally the possibility to improve some qualities of singer's expression.
- Very important are mental advantages of group work, such as: stimulation and relaxation of emotional aspects of personality, greater motivation and impact on self-assessment, less mental obstacles, the development of some qualities of the will, social relationships and bonds.

## 2 Some Internal Factors Limiting the Voice Preparation of Early Education And Primary School Teachers

“Singing has no doubts its particularities and voice is one of them, especially its colour, sonority and extent according to which the quality of voice is recognised in a singer. There are opinions that everybody can sing and everybody has a voice, however, everybody's voice must be found and improved. The truth is that we are always limited by dispositions, talents and abilities of a singer”<sup>6</sup>. It can be noted that especially the students who are not especially predestined to singing choose the study programme of preschool and elementary pedagogy. In the beginning of the first semester the upper limit of their vocal range moves approximately between  $c^2$ -  $d^2$ , or higher; their expression is little cultivated and needs further development. In the Table 1 we introduce the most frequent deficiencies of basic physiological and technical attributes of singing in colloquial speech and in singing expression of students at the beginning of their voice training.

Table 1

The outline of most frequent physiological and technical singing deficiencies in colloquial speech and in singing expression at the beginning of voice training

	The Description of Phenomena
<b>a) Deficiencies in everyday colloquial speech</b>	Dynamically weaker, a little productive voice with missing head/nasal resonance, low colloquial pitch of voice.
	Dynamically weaker, a little productive voices with arious amount of respiration/breath(ing).
	Incorrect breath(ing)/respiration technique with predominant upper breathing.
	Incorrect articulation (stiff and slightly movable jaw, insufficient activity of articulatory organs – lips, tongue), fast tempo of speech with insufficient articulation, speech errors, incorrect division of semantic units and incorrect intonation in interrogative sentences.
	Weak voice condition.

<sup>6</sup> M. Žiarna, *Adekvátny výber speváckeho repertoáru pre žiakov ZUŠ*, [in:] “Slovenská hudba, revue pre hudobnú kultúru” 2014, vol. XL, no. 1, p. 75.

<b>b) Deficiencies in singing expression</b>	<b>In posture:</b> relaxed body posture, or sitting position or various extent of tension characterized by muscle tension in the muscles of the neck (pushing forward of the chin – cervical lordosis) or facial muscles, restlessness, and nervousness, manifested by the turning of the body, and purposeless movements of the limbs.
	<b>In breathing:</b> incorrect breathing technique caused by upper breathing, shoulder lifting, short, uneconomical breath, missing phase of breath-hold.
	<b>In the field of tone creation:</b> voices with various extent of breathing ingredients, on the other side pressed phonation and strong intensity of singing expression, the dominance of chest resonance, register inconsistency of voice, low voice deployment and subsequent glissando, elevated pitch of larynx, harsh voice beginnings connected with putting the tone on vocals.
	<b>In the field of articulation and vocalisation:</b> incorrect opening of the mouth connected with less active articulation, clumsy pronunciation, incorrect hyphenation during singing, incorrect pronunciation of consonants, unfinished ending of words in singing, wide vocalisation, “broken vocalisation”.
	<b>In the field of phrasing and interpretation:</b> phrasing that does not correspond with musical principles, breath before the end of phrases, singing with no interest and emotional content.
	<b>In the field of intonation purity of singing expression:</b> intonation inaccuracies caused by emotional instability, and stage fright, intonation inaccuracies caused by a small vocal range, and in some cases also impure speech intonation due to insufficiently developed musical skills.
	<b>In the field of voice condition:</b> weak voice condition, incapability of extended vocal expression.

Source: authoress

Quality of students' voice dispositions is decreasing. It is determined predominately by their relatively restricted singing experience, because the frequency of singing expression in Slovak families is quite low and the *direct contact of students with music art* is quite rare. Listening to music belongs to the most important music activities, conscious and unconscious. However, the experience from the practice confirms that the repertoire of children's folk songs is quite poor. More and more students have insufficient vocal range<sup>7</sup>, who in their “individual pitch” can sing purely,

<sup>7</sup> Note: Inappropriate voice range is the one in low voice position that can be marked by tones g-g1 and corresponds to harsh register of female voice. Dominant voice pitch similar to colloquial speech is the result of insufficient singing experience. Dominant pectoral register prevents students to intonate purely even a simple children's song, for example in tonalities D major, E flat major, E major that are the most suitable due to vocal range of children, but do not correspond to their voice options.

but they modulate higher melodious tones according to the scope of their voices. The intonation instability is caused by insufficient experience of undergraduate students with singing and subsequent undeveloped voice apparatus, and other mental barriers. All the facts mentioned have a serious impact on the attitude and motivation of the future teachers toward singing.

### 3 The Development of Student's Voice Competences in Creative Activities

The goal of the subject Music Education is based on practical school teaching, it can cultivate voice expression of students and teach them real fundamentals, such as physiological using of voice apparatus in singing and colloquial expression, correct posture, correct singing breathing/respiration, especially conscious *breathing in* before every musical phrase, concept of breathing, opening mouth, soft tone creation and its legato, improvement of articulation and vocalisation, extension of vocal range and improvement of voice conditioning, and so on. The acquisition of correct singing habits is important to sing in a rhythmically correct way, to intonate purely, and to use appropriate expressional tools to be able to sing songs from textbooks of Music Education for primary grades of elementary schools. The development of singing abilities of students can be reached mainly by the appropriate choice of music material (folk or spiritual songs for children). Within the content of the subject there belongs also the methodology of working with voice of preschool and younger school age children, with the particularities of collective singing, possibilities of using creative and integrative methods and techniques in singing activities that have the potency to form motivation and attitude toward singing itself.

Examples:

- Speech training – choice of appropriate material that can be used in pre-primary and primary education, voice games, tongue twisters and short literary forms, creative activities that lead children toward improvement of their speech expression.
- Engaging students in the creation of activities in preparatory exercises, later also in particular songs that accentuate a component of singing expression – posture during singing, breathing/respiratory, articulation, resonant, rhythmical, voice exercises, methodology of training and fixing the song.
- Practical choice of the song repertoire aimed at certain developmental stages, their peculiarities and singing abilities of children, improvement of some components of singing expression or some technical aspects during singing.
- Creative activities focused on diatonic sequences in major scale, conscious vocal rhythm and intonation, rhythm and melodic rhymes (relations: so-mi, so-mi-do, so-la-so-mi).
- The development of musical ideas and vocal creativity by reshaping of well-known songs (rhythmical component, melody, text, tempo, dynamics, tonality and so on).

### 3.1 Other Inspirations for Music Practice

#### 3.1.1 Butterfly

**Age:** 5-8 year old children.

**Aim:** Relax the body, enhance concentration and breathing, and practice breathing muscle flexibility.

**Time to implement the activity:** 5 to 7 minutes.

**Tools:** CD player, background music, appropriate for developmental stage, for example: Brian Crain *Butterfly Waltz*<sup>8</sup>, head-clothes or scarves.

**Organisation:** sit in a in a semi-circle on chairs (can also be used fit ball).

Table 2

Motivational story *Butterfly*

Motivational Story	Description of the Activities
<i>It was morning. The first sun rays tickled the flower heads in the meadow. One of the marguerites hid a sleeping butterfly curled into a ball.</i>	Active sitting on the seating surface of the chair, feet slightly apart. Join your hands together, then bend them behind our heads, the elbows are pointed toward themselves, slowly bend the heads, shoulders, back, and lean forward as low as possible.
<i>A butterfly that is not awoken yet, is sitting on a flower and yawns loudly.</i>	From the position of bending forward return to sitting position, out of which release your hands and put them on thighs, then yawn 2-3 times (can be post-synchronised by sound).
<i>Then he decided to look around and greet flowers in a meadow by a smile.</i>	Act as curious → stretch our necks (but do not lift the chin), look into the distance as if you would like to grow. Bow your heads to the side to stretch your neck muscles.
<i>As soon as he did so, he began to straighten out/stretch out his beautiful wings.</i>	Raise your arms and put your hands down in a relaxed way, next to your bodies, stay like that for a few seconds. Then let your hands fall down. Several times round off and straighten your backs.
<i>Then he showed himself in his entire length.</i>	Stand straight. Move your hands while they are close to your bodies – arms are raised forward, then stretch your arms sideways and let them fall freely to the body.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Crain, *Butterfly Waltz*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqCdKOdX5FQ&list=RDxqCdKOdX5FQ#t=147](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqCdKOdX5FQ&list=RDxqCdKOdX5FQ#t=147) [accessed on: 11/9/2014].

<p><i>He could not resist and breathed the scent of flowers' odour and flapped his wings again.</i></p>	<p>Smell the flowers, wait a bit (hold your breath) and exhale. To make the breath visible, repeat the same arm movement: from arms close to your body position, through arms raising forward to the double arms distance – hold your breath, hands are slowly declining close to your body – expiration could be also post-synchronised by sound (sh-sh-sh, bz-bz-bz). Note: Children can repeat the activity individually, and a teacher can easily observe the length of their expiration thanks to the movement of their hands and arms.</p>
<p><i>It saw that there stayed pollen grains on his wings, and he blew them away.</i></p>	<p>Exercise of the flexibility of breathing muscles. Hands are slightly bent to the shoulder height as if we wanted to hug somebody, the fingers can be connected. Blow away the pollen grains from the hands, directly from the left shoulder.</p>
<p><i>Then there was nothing that prevented him from flowing towards the sun.</i></p>	<p>Free movement around the classroom (head-clothes or scarves can be used).</p>

Source: authoress

### 3.1.2 Sight-Singing from the Pictures

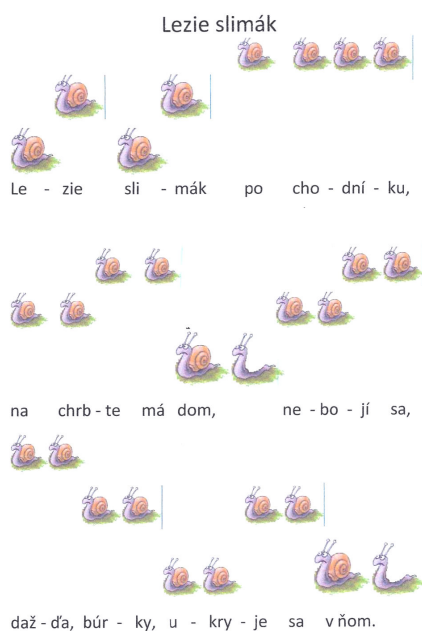


Fig. 1. Tonic Triad (Daniela, B.: *Snail*)  
Author of the text unknown

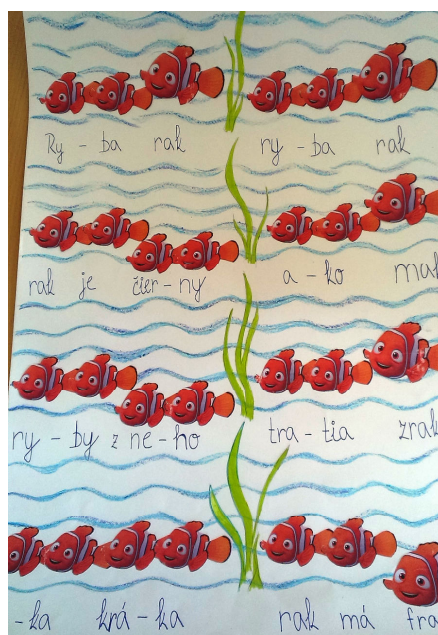


Fig. 2. Relationship between sol-la-sol-mi (Petra Č.: *Fish, crayfish*)  
Author of the text unknown  
Source of pictures: authoress



## Conclusions

Music education at preprimary and primary level of education can be seen as a matter of course, or certainty. However, on the other side we have to overcome obstacles if we want to provide music education at preschool and primary education, despite the fact that “[...] music complements the need of children to move, activates their senses, helps them to spend their time meaningfully, evokes in them phantasy and imagination. It also reduces their mental entropy (confusion), anxiety, and is an effective means to fight with boredom. It has the potency to lead an individual into a state of «flow», which is connected with positive state of entering the activity and during this time nothing seems to be more important than the activity itself. It is the concept invented by Csikszentmihalyi (1996)”<sup>9</sup>.

At Slovak universities the talent search exam from education is no longer required for the admission of candidates who want to become undergraduate students of Preschool and Elementary Pedagogy. It is generally assumed that the applicants have a satisfactory level of musical ability. In reality it is not truth, and mainly it can be seen as the result of the reduction of music lessons at all types of schools since 2008. The study programme (for bachelor and master degree) does not consider the fact of missing practical music abilities and skills of future pedagogues. Thus, the undergraduate students of preschool and elementary pedagogy have almost no space to obtain music abilities and skills, nor develop and improve them. Thus the question emerges about the offer of music activities for the undergraduate students of Preschool and Elementary Pedagogy. The offer of music education at elementary schools is 132 classes. However, the question emerges: Are the future graduates of the aforementioned study programme able to perform simple songs and accompany them with musical instruments? We should take into consideration that “[...] social existence of music is in all its main fields determined by educational activities [...]”<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> E. Králová, *Priaznivé a škodlivé účinky hudby na psychiku a zdraví dieťaťa*, [in:] “Zdravotnícke listy” 2013, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> J. Fukač, S. Tesař, S. Vereš, *Hudební pedagogika. Koncepce a aplikace hudebně výchovných idejí v minulosti a přítomnosti*, Brno 2000, p. 101.

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### **Summary**

#### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF VOICE COMPETENCES OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE STUDY PROGRAMME OF PRESCHOOL AND ELEMENTARY PEDAGOGY**

The contribution deals particularly with external factors limiting voice development in undergraduate students of preschool and elementary pedagogy. The authoress also depicts the ways how to make the acquisition of voice competences more effective during university studies by means of creative activities focused on the voice development of children (students) in a particular stage of education.

*Key words: student of preschool and elementary pedagogy, voice development, voice competences, music activities, external and internal factors limiting voice development*