



Teach Private Lessons to Young Voices with Confidence

Would you like to be more confident working with private voice students under the age of 10?

In this seminar you will learn:

How to create a private lesson curriculum that fulfills and entertains both the teacher and student

How to empower your young students to be excellent musicians

How to choose exercises and repertoire that is appropriate for children under 10

How to make the most of a 30-minute lesson (Lesson plan samples included in presentation)

Similar to watching a baby speak their first words, a voice teacher gets to experience the connections that your young students make as they build their musical skills and vocabulary.

What are the common things I have heard from teachers with concerns about teaching young students?

1. Teaching a child to sing too maturely and causing vocal damage
2. Boredom and restlessness on the student's part
3. Inability to connect with the student on the teacher's part
4. Choosing appropriate repertoire for young students

What are my teaching goals going into every lesson:

1. Be a kind person for a student to spend time with
2. Inspire a love of music
3. Expand their horizons
4. Pace the lesson and activities towards their attention span

When I work with very young children on voice or piano, I am keeping in mind that I am not just teaching music. I am teaching:

1. Reading and writing skills
2. Math
3. Hand/eye coordination
4. Memorization skills
5. Critical thinking skills
6. Executive functioning skills
7. Social skills



As adults we can sometimes get fixated about “getting the most out of a lesson” or trying to go through a certain amount of material at a time. **Let your student do as much as possible. Get them involved.** It might take longer, but it has developmental value for them.

Examples:

1. Let your student physically find their songs in their book or turn their own pages even if it takes a long time
2. Show them how to use an index (if they can read)
3. Show them how page numbers work (if they can read numbers - most children 4+ can)
4. Show them how to set up their practice space and then let them do it
 - a. An example would be, setting up their own music stand to the right height and show/tell them why you put it at that height
 - b. Adjusting how tall their microphone is/putting on their own mic guard
5. Take the time to show them how to make notations in their music, and let them write them in whenever possible
6. Involve them with any clean up tasks after the lesson

Attention Span:

My lesson plans take different forms depending on what kind of person the student is. Do they like slow, detailed work? Do we need to jump around to different things to keep their attention? Are they math or language oriented? Do they have any special needs? Here are two lesson plans that can move between activities at a fairly fast pace, and give more than enough materials or things to do within a 30 min time span.

30 Min Lesson Plan #1: Medium/Short Attention Span

1. Ask personal questions or comments/take interest in a story they want to tell to establish a relationship with your student. 2-5 min
 - a. How was your day?
 - b. Did you have school?
 - c. Tell me about your awesome light up shoes.
2. Have them help you get set up 2-5 min
 - a. Adjust music stand
 - b. Take out materials
3. Vocal warm up 5-10 min



- a. Try to make it fun
 - b. Keep it short
 - c. Goals: to establish routine, to get them to start paying attention to singing with you, not really any serious technique work
 - d. If the student has the attention span I will include some solfege and possibly with hand signs
4. Short song work 5-7 min
 - a. Teach student a short easy song, often a round
 - b. You are building their memory for the round so that then they are ready you can start working on harmonizing through rounds later
 5. Long Song work 5-10 min
 - a. Help them through the process of learning a song
 - b. If they can't read yet this involves a lot of call and response while they are memorizing
 - c. You might only get though a little bit of a song each week - that's ok
 6. Extra time left and the student has no more room for song work? Drawing time! 5 min
 - a. Grab some paper or a white board and start learning how to draw music symbols
 - b. Treble clef and bass clef are popular, draw some other music notes or symbols just to start getting familiar with the shapes- no need to explain what they are yet
 - c. Maybe play some music tic-tac-toe with music notes
 7. Do any finals notes or clean up within their lesson time with the student 2-3 min
 - a. Putting books away or materials in their materials bag
 - b. Erasing the white board
 - c. Putting away any pens or pencils used

Even at the least amount of time take in each section you have a fast paced 30 min lesson

30 Min Lesson Plan #2: Students with longer attention spans

1. Ask about them/their day/their puppy/their shoes 2-5 min
2. Have them set up their practice space 2-5 min
3. Longer warmup/technique work 10 min
 - a. Breathing exercise - just to get the diaphragm moving - like a ha! Ha! Or musical Ha! Ha!
 - b. Following scale patterns
 - c. Funny enunciation scales
 - d. Solfege scales/hand signs



4. Learn a song to be sung as a round eventually 5-7 min
 - a. If student is ready, play their part on the piano with them, and then sing your part after theirs
5. Long song work 7-10 min
 - a. Teaching and helping memorize a longer song 7-10 min
6. Drawing/Theory work 5-10 min
7. Clean up 2-5 min

30 Min Lesson Plan #3: Students who just want to sing

Every once in a while I get someone who really is not interested or who does not have the social or mental ability or desire to concentrate or learn almost anything new at all.

They just want to sing!

1. Ask about them and their non musical life 5min
2. Have them set up their space 2 min
3. Do one quick breathing exercise and one set of a scale based warmup 5-7 min
4. Learn several songs 15 min
 - a. Maybe be working on multiple rounds at the same time
 - i. I have found that this is good as eventually they will be ready to sing them as rounds, but it takes some time with the melodies bouncing around in their head to get to that point
 - b. Working on parts or whole songs
 - i. but not expecting a lot of precision
 - ii. Not expecting them to memorize
 - iii. Moving on to new songs fairly quickly
 - c. Just be together and make music
5. Clean up their space 2 min

Technique:

For the average under 10 year old student I don't focus on a lot of technique, besides just some **breathing exercises and some posture reminders**. For most students, just spending time with you singing and having you demonstrate healthy singing is enough to get them on a good track.

I do try to take the vibrato out of my voice when singing with younger children. Many of them have a very good ear and will start to put a warble in their voice to emulate a strong vibrato in their teacher's voice. If you cannot take the vibrato out of your voice, I recommend playing the piano along with everything you sing for your



student. Many students also have a hard time hearing the actual pitch if they are listening to a heavily vibrato voice, but the piano along with your voice helps.

The only other thing we might experiment with, depending on the student, is trying to sing louder or softer during exercises, or different parts of the song for dramatic effect.

What to do about the ability to match pitch?

Some students are going to be coming into the studio fairly good at matching pitch and some aren't. I usually don't worry about anyone under 8 who can't match pitch. In our world today, it seems like more and more children don't have an adult in their household who sings songs with them. They often have a teacher at school who does, or maybe their guardians set them up with songs playing on youtube or a tv show. I wait and see if just spending concentrated time singing with a professional starts to help them match pitch. It often does.

I might prod gently, and say something like, "can you listen to this and try to do exactly what I am doing?" - with no emotional investment behind it. Or we might make a game of it, like "Simon Says", and I will sing two or three notes or play them on the piano and see if they can start concentrating more on matching if they are actively thinking about it.

In general I don't even really try to do any deep work on pitch matching if a student is under 7. Many people grow into it as they mature. I had one student who was never on pitch for 2 years, and then when she turned 6, she said to me "Am I supposed to be singing exactly what you're singing?" and I said "yes", and then she was on the pitch forevermore.

I've only had a few long term students (students who I taught from about 6-18) who didn't grow into pitch matching and that I had to work with as they got older on some more intensive and therapeutic ear training and pitch matching. (and they became lovely in tune singers)

Choosing Songs:

Another thing that happens quite often is that the majority of a young student's musical exposure is from whatever the adults in their life listen to on the radio. So often they come in and want to sing something they heard on the radio. I want to gently expand their horizons.

Most students transition to learning some folk or musical theater and are really happy about it. Remember that you can sing selections of songs, or change the genre of a song to fit your student's interests, so try not to rule anything out, and feel free to



expand past the usual musical theater songs for children, like “Castle on a cloud” or “Tomorrow”, etc... That repertoire is awesome and still fun for a lot of students.

“Lost Boy” and “Black bird” are examples of some pop and rock songs that are often really popular with young children, and also are vocally appropriate if put into a good key for their voice. With a 6-8 year old there is such a range of maturity that you could be teaching “Mary had a little lamb” to one 7 year old student, and “Lost Boy” to another and they are suited to those individual students.

My best advice is to get to know your student before picking songs, and to take what you know of them into consideration. Sometimes I feel like I am asking them to try a new food when I bring songs in that are outside of their experience. Take time to listen to things together. Look at their response to listening and gauge whether you think this song will ignite their soul. Talk about the songs you listened to, and get impressions from your students. Most of them have a lot to say about what they heard even at a very young age.

Some books that I like to use:

- **150 Rounds for Singing and Teaching** - Paperback – June 1, 2004 by Edward Bolkavec & Judith Johnson
- **The Teen's Musical Theatre Collection: Young Women's Edition** Paperback – August 1, 2001
- **Musical Theatre Anthology for Teens: Young Women's Edition (Vocal Collection)** Paperback – September 1, 2001
- **Musical Theatre Anthology for Teens: Young Men's Edition - Accompaniment CD Only** Paperback – Unabridged, February 1, 2005
- **Kids' Musical Theatre Collection: Volumes 1 and 2 Complete** Paperback – January 1, 2014
- (All of the above are available on Amazon)

Special Needs:

Be with whatever is presented to you. There is no magic lesson plan or advice I have that covers what you may encounter. Students with autism present in a huge spectrum of needs and behaviors, from needing the piano to be played more quietly at all times, to being ok with making no eye contact, to being able to move or fidget during lessons, to being ok with your student needing to go blow their nose every 5 min on the dot. ADHD can present with many of those behaviors. Students with



dyslexia can present with confusion, difficulty following patterns, and looking at music. I could probably write a book of presented symptoms and what I do to make a lesson for a student that is joyful and successful, so the only rule of thumb that encompasses all of it is:

Be with what is, and not what you expect something to be.

This is just a rule for success for all your students. You might have a lesson planned out, but then if you are really noticing the person you are spending time with you will find yourself changing that plan on the fly.

Children under 10 have less social control of their emotions in general and are affected by schedule changes, and being tired, etc more than older students/adults who have learned to regulate their emotions and needs in front of other people. Be confident in yourself that maybe today your student is very tired and you are going to spend the whole time drawing and listening to classical music, or that you can see on their face they cannot stand the song you are working on and pull something else out of your bag of tricks.

Have a bag of tricks. Have some music games that you can pull out anytime. Be ok if your student is not able to memorize songs. Help your student figure out that coloring their vocal line helps them see the music better and not get confused. **Be creative**, but even more than that **be flexible**. Be your student's best advocate.

Happy Teaching!

Christa Durand

Christ@FunMusicLessons.com

www.FunMusicLessons.com

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