

Practical Study on Two-Part Singing Instruction in Primary School Music Education from the Perspective of Aesthetic Perception

Yuqiao Wang

China Conservatory of Music, Beijing 100031, China

Abstract

In light of the current marginalization and superficial treatment of aesthetic perception cultivation in primary school music education, this paper takes the teaching practice of *Let's Row Our Oars* at A Primary School in Beijing as an example to conduct an in-depth analysis of the common issues in current two-part singing instruction: single teaching methods dominated by mechanical imitation and repetitive training; unreasonable classroom time allocation that neglects auditory coordination and harmonic perception between parts, resulting in fragmented aesthetic experiences among students. In response to these problems, this paper proposes specific optimization strategies: guiding students to listen and cooperate through vocal warm-ups by parts, melody exchange between parts, and rounds, enabling them to perceive the beauty of harmonic fusion; emphasizing the use of conducting gestures to help students understand musical emotions and structures, thus elevating technical training into students' intrinsic aesthetic experience.

Keywords

Aesthetic perception, two-part singing instruction, music teaching.

1. Introduction

Aesthetic perception refers to an individual's ability to sense, appreciate, and create beauty based on certain aesthetic experiences. The perception of beauty is the starting point of aesthetic activity, while the appreciation of beauty builds upon perception to achieve a deeper level of understanding and recognition. According to *Compulsory Education Arts Curriculum Standards (2022 Edition)* (hereinafter referred to as the "New Curriculum Standards"), "Aesthetic perception refers to the ability to discover, feel, understand, and respond to the characteristics, meanings, and functions of beauty in the natural world, social life, and artistic works". [1] In the field of music education, the cultivation of aesthetic perception is of vital importance. Leo Tolstoy pointed out that the aesthetic perception of music is a process of "emotional infection." The artist expresses emotions they have personally experienced through music, and the audience perceives this expression, themselves experiencing the same emotions, thereby completing the aesthetic activity [2]. From the cognitive and psychological perspective, aesthetic perception is regarded as an active process of information processing and mental construction [3]. It emphasizes guiding students to build an aesthetic cognitive framework, analyze the form structure and emotions from musical works, and conduct critical understanding. Guide students to create beauty and musical works in their daily lives, and ultimately transform their musical aesthetic cognition into creative musical practice. This forms a cognitive cycle of musical aesthetics.

However, although the new curriculum reform places "aesthetic perception" at the forefront of core musical literacy, in practical primary school music instruction, its cultivation is often marginalized, superficial, and overly technical. As pointed out in the article *Building Education*

of Beauty and Implementing Moral Education through Aesthetics, current music teaching still tends to focus mainly on teaching students a few songs from the textbook, with instructional methods limited to listening to recordings or simple oral instruction. Such single and mechanical teaching approaches fail to stimulate students' learning interest and hinder the development of their aesthetic perception abilities [4]. Therefore, based on the theoretical foundation of aesthetic perception and combined with the case of two-part singing instruction at A Primary School in Beijing, this paper explores how to effectively integrate aesthetic perception into music teaching, providing valuable insights for better incorporating aesthetic perception into primary school music education.

2. The Importance of Aesthetic Perception in Two-part Singing Instruction in Primary School Music Education

The primary school stage is a crucial period for the formation and development of students' aesthetic and value concepts. Music education can, through sensory experience, stimulate students' emotional resonance and creative thinking, guiding them to cultivate sound aesthetic perception by appreciating the beauty of music [5].

The primary school stage serves as the foundation and key phase for students to understand the world, express themselves, and develop creative thinking. At this stage, students are full of curiosity and a desire to explore [6]. Therefore, students' aesthetic sensibility at this stage possesses great plasticity and potential. Teachers should employ a series of engaging and effective teaching methods to stimulate students' musical potential, guide them to appreciate the beauty of music, and encourage them to develop personal aesthetic abilities and unique appreciation skills through diverse musical experiences. This process enhances their sensitivity and creativity toward musical beauty, laying the foundation for positive aesthetic and perceptual abilities. Moreover, through collaborative musical activities such as choir singing and ensemble performance, students can learn to listen, communicate, and cooperate with others.

3. Analysis of Common Problems in Primary School Two-Part Singing Instruction under the Objective of "Aesthetic Perception"

"Music aesthetic education aims to enable students to devote themselves wholeheartedly to classroom learning in a specific educational environment, allowing their minds to approach and perceive music to the greatest extent possible". [7] However, in practice, this study finds that music teaching at the primary school level often lacks innovative design and interactivity, and problems exist in both lesson structure and time allocation. For example, when teaching two-part singing, teachers typically teach the higher part first, then the lower part, and finally have the two parts performed together. In this process, the teacher functions merely as a commander, while students repeatedly imitate the teacher's pitch and rhythm. Such a single and rigid teaching method, centered on mechanical imitation and repetitive training, neglects students' perception and exploration of harmonic beauty and structural beauty, making it difficult for them to experience the soundscape and sense of flow created by the interweaving of different vocal parts. The aesthetic process is thus reduced to an exercise in memorization and imitation. Furthermore, this reveals that in music classrooms, teachers spend a significant amount of time on repetitive drills of isolated technical skills while neglecting auditory training and the cultivation of inner hearing. Consequently, time dedicated to comprehensive performance, aesthetic evaluation, and creative activities is severely insufficient. Take, for instance, a 40-minute music class: time is allocated as follows, basic vocal exercises: 5 minutes; learning parts separately: 20 minutes; combined rehearsal of both parts: 10 minutes; song refinement and

presentation: 5 minutes. During the combined rehearsal, teachers often make comments such as, "The higher part should be louder!" or "The lower part is off-pitch!" Such instructions often make students nervous, unsure how to adjust or perform. This process shows that in two-part instruction, students merely sing mechanically in response to the piano accompaniment or the teacher's directives. It demonstrates that in two-part music teaching, the instructional objective is simply to have students complete the performance of the song. Teachers spend most of the time on fragmented learning of individual parts, and during the brief "combined rehearsal" stage, they fail to teach students how to listen to the other part's singing, or how to make self-adjustments upon hearing it, so as to achieve a more harmonious performance between the two parts. Therefore, relying solely on mechanical singing practice, without allowing students to perceive differences in dynamics, timbre, and tone, or to understand variations in emotional expression, results in a fragmented and superficial aesthetic perception. Students thus fail to develop an awareness or ability to listen to the overall harmony, preventing vocal education from advancing to higher levels of "artistic expression" and "aesthetic creation".

When teaching the course *Let's Sway Twin Oars*, the author found that during the first lesson, students had already mastered the key and difficult points of the main melody of the song and were able to perform it accurately and expressively in its entirety. In the second lesson, which focused on two-part singing instruction, the author first guided the students to read and sing the lower part of the melody. Using interval construction singing, the author corrected the parts where students sang incorrectly or off pitch. Afterward, the students sang through the lower part together. Upon reviewing the main melody, when the two parts were combined, a variety of problems began to appear, such as the lower part being inaudible, both parts going off pitch, students failing to follow the teacher's conducting gestures, and not knowing when the lower part should begin singing. From this, the author realized that two-part instruction is one of the more challenging aspects of fifth-grade music teaching. Students' long-term singing habits, their singing proficiency, and their musical foundation can all lead to disharmony between the choral parts. This phenomenon compels teachers to guide students to analyze musical phrases and to perceive the prelude and interlude, helping them realize that music is an integrated whole with structure and design. In this way, students' aesthetic perception can be guided from focusing only on "the few lines they can sing" to paying attention to the development, transitions, and the dialogue and interaction between parts, thereby making their aesthetic perception more structured and coherent.

4. Optimization Strategies for Two-Part Singing Instruction in Music Classrooms

"In complex sound structures, selective attention and maintenance of focus on sound, as well as the perception of the overall integrity of a musical work, are key indicators in determining whether one possesses musical aesthetic ability". [8] In the objectives of the second stage (Grades 3-5) of the New Curriculum Standards [1], it is stated that fifth-grade students should possess rich musical emotions and experiences, be able to perceive, experience, and understand the sensuous characteristics and aesthetic qualities of music, and be capable of singing and performing with confidence and natural expression, thereby enhancing their ability to communicate and collaborate through practice. At this stage, the music curriculum requires students to be willing to participate in various singing activities and to sing solo or in ensemble, rounds, fixed-pattern accompaniment, or other relatively simple forms of choral singing, using correct posture, technique, and voice, with confidence and emotion.

Using *Let's Row Our Oars* as an example, this paper explores how to enhance students' aesthetic perception in two-part singing instruction. In fifth-grade music textbooks, the two-part melodies usually place the main melody in the higher part. The higher part has a catchy and

easily singable melody, which students tend to learn quickly, while the lower part is more difficult to memorize and less intuitive to sing. Without sufficient training, students assigned to the lower part are easily led astray by the higher part during performance. Furthermore, students' awareness of choral singing is rather limited, and their auditory sensitivity to other parts is underdeveloped. For them, achieving synchronization between the two parts is already considered satisfactory, though in reality this is far from sufficient. In addition, many teachers still employ the traditional "listen and repeat" approach when introducing new songs, without delving deeply into the explanation of accurate pitch and rhythm. As a result, most students only acquire a superficial understanding of musical knowledge. This method also leads students to focus unilaterally on their own voice and volume, without learning how to listen to others and pursue vocal unity and harmony in singing.

Therefore, at the beginning of the class, teachers can adopt the method of separate-part vocal training by dividing the students into two groups. Starting with simple single-tone exercises, one part sings a sustained "do", while the other part sings a sustained "mi". Students should be encouraged to listen carefully to the opposite part's tone and sing more softly to achieve a unified and harmonious timbre. Once this goal is achieved, the teacher can add a sustained "sol", joining in as well to form a three-part harmony. This approach trains students to listen to other parts and to seek vocal balance and uniformity, thereby deepening their understanding of two-part singing in a subtle and gradual way. During the formal two-part instruction of the song, teachers can let the two parts switch melodies and sing each other's part or have one part remain silent while listening attentively to the other or begin with the two parts performing the song in a round. Through these methods, students can shift from focusing only on their own voice and believing that singing louder is better, to learning how to listen to others and appreciate the beauty of vocal fusion.

Teachers should guide students to understand the gestures of the conductor. By understanding the role of the conductor, they can adjust their own musical expression, promote the harmonious expression of the two parts, and make students' aesthetic cognition and experience of chorus and harmony more profound. In the process of teaching two-part singing, students' musical thinking has been expanded, their sense of cooperation has been strengthened, their auditory and musical aesthetic perception abilities have been cultivated, and they have experienced the beauty of multi-part music.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of music education is to elevate students' aesthetic sensibility through musical teaching activities, to cultivate their character, and to enhance their aesthetic ability. This paper takes two-part singing training as an example to specifically elaborate on how to cultivate students' harmonic aesthetic sense, so that music education does not merely remain at technical training but becomes a carrier for students to perceive and create musical beauty. Teachers should not only master solid professional knowledge such as conducting and harmony, but also possess the ability to transform this knowledge into aesthetic perception. So as to achieve the educational ideal of cultivating people through beauty and refining emotion through art.

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