

Singing and studying the development of singing skills

Brief summary statement of theoretical position

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My initial interest in singing and the development of singing arose out of the recognition that for an infant/very young child learning how to talk many of the earliest sounds they make appear as much 'musical' as they do 'word-like'. In other words, from the child's view point they task they have, when learning how to talk, is to recognize the conditions under which they are required to make 'this' rather than 'that' sound. Now, it turns out that only when the sounds infants are making begin to approximate to the sounds of the conversation around them do people (parents, family and so on) consider that they are beginning to, 'talk' – use language appropriately. The reasons for the child becoming 'languaged' in this way are unclear and remain the focus of research in child language and language acquisition. However, these observations serve to remind us that language learning children hear words as 'sounds', and not necessarily as initially distinct lexical items. The manner in which 'word' sounds gradually become distinct, and differentiated from 'music/singing-sounds', has yet to be fully understood, particularly given that the very earliest speech a child hears contains many of those same elements said to constitute musicality (rhythm, rhyme and sound repetition, intonational change and transformation).

For the present, I aim to adopt, broadly speaking, the same social-pragmatic focus I have with respect to conversational skill, to understanding what is involved in learning how to sing. In other words, the kinds of questions, issues and concerns underpinning the focus I adopt, are ultimately of a social pragmatic orientation – rather than say, a cognitive developmental focus. At this stage in the AIRS project the various singing tasks that form the basis of the AIRS battery will help lay down a firm ground for a baseline description of musicality related skills and competencies of both children and adults in different cultural contexts. It will be very interesting to be involved in considering and developing various different measures, indices and methods for establishing realizable indicators of the development of singing skills – both quantitative and qualitative – particularly those that enhance comparisons across different cultural contexts.