When teaching in any specialist area, there are always a number of things to consider. This is what separates the specialist teacher from the general practitioner, who might have a sound pedagogical knowledge, but who may not have the advanced knowledge required to really excel within a specific field. Teaching adolescents is clearly one of these areas, and we must remember that “a teacher of music has a great and serious responsibility to the vocal health and development of his/her students as they transverse through the physiological changes of adolescence.” (Haston: p.24).

General practitioners will be able to teach the fundamentals of vocal technique, but it takes a specialist with an accurate knowledge of both teaching and vocal pedagogy, specific to an area or age group, to really make the magic happen:

Before we even begin to teach music, singing or any form of technique, we must as educators have knowledge of the specific needs of our students, because: “To hear an eight-year old boy speak is not to hear a twelve-year old boy speak” (Ashley: p.42) - both have their own individual needs.

Adolescence can be a difficult time. There is much change physically and emotionally, awakenings and new awareness of the world around. As
Coral Gould states, “adolescence is a period of growth in more ways than just physical... this age can be fraught with insecurity.” (p.179).

At a recent AOTOS conference, I was part of a brief discussion about teaching voice, during which it was noted that teaching singing can be as much about counselling and therapy as technique and music. Gould states that “in singing we are dealing with anatomy, physical strength and emotions” (p.179), with which I fervently agree. With adolescence can come an awakening of a negative awareness that often remains with us for the rest of our lives. “Adolescence is a most difficult period of life. It is a wonder anyone survives it!” (Phillips: p.75)

There are a number of what I will call ‘specialist needs’ involved in teaching adolescents, which are quite different to those of teaching adults or indeed children:

Specialist needs: Emotional

There are a number of psychological factors attached to singing, which any good singing teacher must be aware of. “Teaching music to adolescents requires great intuition and patience... teachers must work to win over students in ways that create a special bond.” (Phillips: p. 75).

A teacher of the adolescent age range must be even more aware of these psychological issues, as adolescents are often more unstable than adults. “The adolescent temperament is often mercurial, characterised by rapid and unpredictable changeableness of mood” [and it is] “a period of maturation that can be fraught with insecurity as physiological and psychological changes require new ways of dealing with life.” (Phillips: p. 75).

It is due to these factors that a singing teacher working with this age group must have a secure teaching pedagogy, able to “deal with a group of students that varies widely in physical size, personality, mental ability and emotional stability.” (Phillips: p.75)
Singing can have an enormous impact upon both boys and girls emotionally. Ashley believes “a young boy of any social class or ethnicity is heading for trouble with his peers if he does not ‘perform’ in some way that is suggestive of greater physical capital than that possessed by girls.” (P.9), and singing is often seen as ‘soft’, and thus not a desirable activity in which to take part.

Phillips believes that “maintaining boys’ active interest in singing during the adolescent years is a major challenge to music educators” (p. 75), as “the development of identity is the most fundamental task of boyhood.” (Ashley: p.8). However, this issue is not something that applies only to boys. The emotional difficulties associated with singing can affect girls just as much. Deidre Trundle states that when teaching girls “around 13 - 14 years their self-confidence can take a nosedive and they become negative and insecure. It is important that singing remains an area of confidence and pleasure during this unsettling time. A physiologically informed and musical approach by the teacher can help ensure this.” (p.6)

Therefore “when teaching we need to be aware of what is really going on in our pupils’ minds. What are they thinking? What do they see? What do they understand? How are they interpreting what we say?” (Harris p.51) We must remember that adolescents may not always be the students who voice their difficulties in order to attempt to save face. Too much challenge may cause students to “retreat to safer ground” (Karen McKenzie: Child Psychology: 2007: p.2)

Specialist Needs: Physical

The concept of the changing voice during adolescence is well published, yet it is still an area of uncertainty amongst many voice teachers and professionals working in the field. The notion of the ‘breaking voice’ (referring to male adolescents) can be dated back to the nineteenth
In more recent times we have tried to move away from the image of the voice ‘breaking’ as it brings with it connotations which are unhelpful (or almost feared). Instead, most vocal practitioners today will refer to the voice ‘changing’ during adolescence, which seems to be more accurate terminology, particularly in light of research completed by those such as John Cooksey, whose “studies gave clear support for the principle of mutational changes rather than a sudden break.” (Ashley: p.44). We must be clear that at no point does the voice ‘break’ or cease to function for any period of time, however short. After all, most adolescents continue to talk using the same anatomy. Instead, it goes through a series of hormonal changes, brought about by muscular growth, which (in Cooksey’s research) can be classified into ‘typical’ periods of time or stages.

Different practitioners still have their own beliefs on how the voice should be used during adolescence and I think there is still much room for further research into the area, particularly in reference to the changes girls’ voices undergo during the same period. Deidre Trundle states that “research into the female adolescent voice is neither as extensive nor so clear cut” (p.1) and when we refer to vocal change during adolescence, it is almost always with reference to boys. Some agree with Garcia’s notion that the voice should be rested and not used for singing during this period, while others, informed with more recent information on the subject, brought to us by such researchers as Sir Morell McKenzie, advocate that - to varying degrees - singing is “possible, desirable and beneficial during puberty.” (Trundle p.1).

In his text “Teaching Kids to Sing” Kenneth Phillips states that “adolescent singers are capable of a far greater richness of sound than is commonly heard.” (p.54) and in her text “Voice Work” Christina Shewell states her belief that “boys can continue to sing during pubertal changes, but there needs to be respect for what the boy might be feeling, and
limitations in repertoire and exercises” (p.118). I believe that Shewell is most accurate here, in her analysis not only of the physical, but of the psychological. As the voice is such a personal and emotive instrument to each of us, it is vital (particularly during this stage of identity change and insecurity) that any singing is approached with an equal respect of the emotional needs of the student - which may well alter from lesson to lesson!

Although less well documented, the voice actually continues to change throughout our lives. Contrary to popular belief we are not born with the anatomy required in speech and singing: “it is not until the age of 2 - 3 years that the thyroarytenoid muscles and vocal fold ligament begin to develop” (Trundle p.3) and we end our lives with a different type of voice to that which we worked with during our thirties. In fact, the greatest vocal change actually occurs between the age of one and three, when “there is a very rapid fall in pitch from approx. 500Hz to 300Hz as the infant voice mutates to the child voice.” (Ashley: p.43). The male voice continues to grow and change well into the later 20’s and it is this period (24 - 30 years) that many institutions, such as Music Conservatoires, prefer more advanced vocal study to occur.

Nonetheless it is probably true to say that the voice undergoes its most noticeable course of change during the hormonal ‘explosion’ of adolescence, which is why this period of life is generally so noted for all change, not just the vocal kind. During adolescence “the male vocal folds quickly grow an additional 4-11 millimetres, an increase of 60 per cent… [while] the female vocal folds can grow 1.5-4 millimetres, an increase of 34 per cent.” (Trundle p.3) Trundle states that “because of this quick growth rate any of the following vocal problems can occur in either sex:

1. Insecurity of pitch
2. Development of noticeable register breaks
3. Increase of huskiness
4. Decreased and inconsistent range

5. Uncomfortable singing

6. Heavy, breathy, rough or colourless tone

7. Breathy, thin quality to certain pitches

8. Voice cracking

9. Hoarseness”

(Trundle p.3)

“It is arguably during this period that the most interesting singing by boys is done.” (Ashley: p.43). In addition to the above issues, which refer mainly to quality of sound during phonation, teachers need to take into account that “the cartilages of the larynx are not yet calcified during adolescence, meaning they are still soft and pliable. Whilst in this state they have the potential to be easily damaged” (Trundle p.3), and with particular reference to point five above, that any uncomfortable singing (at any age) should be avoided.

The age at which the onset of puberty and therefore vocal transition occurs has continued to alter over the last century, gradually becoming earlier. “The hormonal changes and increased growth in various parts of the body can start to happen any time between the ages of 10 and 15, and are generally earlier in girls.” (Shewell p.117). Various theories as to the reason for this change include “better nutrition, increased artificial light levels, increased hormones in drinking water and the amount of psycho-sexual stimulation.” (Shewell p.117). Trundle writes that “while the onset of puberty seems to have stabilized in boys around 11 years, in girls it is continuing to drop. In Caucasian girls, it is currently around 10 years, whilst in Afro-Caribbean girls it can be nine months to a year earlier.” (p. 5).
Changes which occur in boys:

Boys will experience the greatest level of vocal change. In comparison to girls, the length of boys’ vocal cords will double during the period of adolescence and it is this dramatic growth, and the speed at which it occurs, which can sometimes make coordination of the muscles problematic, resulting in the unexpected sounds produced. We should also be aware that although researchers such as Cooksey and Trundle have successfully categorised the ‘typical’ stages of vocal change, adolescence is often far from ‘typical’. Some boys or girls may find that they have a particularly turbulent time for a number of reasons, encountering any number of vocal difficulties from huskiness to “stormy voice mutation”. However it is worth noting “that the majority of male adolescents have uneventful voice change.” (Aronson and Bless p.17).

Below are the five main stages from Cooksey and Trundle (not including the ‘unchanged’ mode which Trundle includes), detailing the vocal transition of male adolescents.

Stage one: 6 - 9 months

During this stage of change the vocal tessitura (comfortable working range) becomes smaller. The upper partial becomes lower than it was previously and there is a slight extension of the lower end. Typically, the extended ‘safe’ vocal range (which must be achievable without ‘cracks’ or ‘flips’ if you are to use it, and which assumes that the singer will not be using falsetto) now lies between G#2 and C4, and the minimum expected modal range is B3 to G3\(^1\). This first stage is triggered by hormone release and “there is nothing that can be done to stop it.” (Trundle p.8)

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\(^1\) At VIDLA we use the common numbering system whereby Middle C = C4, and the numbers change on A, thus A below Middle C = A4, and A above Middle C = A5.

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Stage two: 12 - 14 months

“The voice is in full change” (Trundle p.9). During this stage, the vocal tessitura becomes smaller still. The upper partial becomes lower than before and there is some small further lower extension. Typically, the extended ‘safe’ vocal range now lies between F2 and A4, and the minimum expected modal range is G#2 to F3. Trundle notes that during this stage there is more defined registration between modal (full voice) falsetto and whistle registers, with falsetto now occurring above A4, which can be heard by “an audible gear change.” (p.9) It is during this stage of change that vocal damage can occur more easily. Although practitioners such as Chapman maintain “that falsetto is a legitimate technique available to any male voice... a large question mark hangs over its use by boys.” This is partly because too many expert teachers raise questions about whether prolonged falsetto harms the immature voice, but also because, as Chapman states, the falsetto voice “sounds to the listener to have a female quality” (Chapman: p.68), and as we have already discussed, identity is such an important part of adolescent singing. Trundle states that boys should not sing in falsetto during stage 2: “I do not advocate the use of falsetto and whistle register during this stage” (p.9) as the “constant air flow associated with the low closure quotient dries the folds out.” (Ashley: p.53). She states that instead “boys should sing alto or tenor during this stage” (p.9). Others such as Frederick Swanson disagree and recommend the use of falsetto in order to successfully bridge transitions “from treble tones down through the break area”, as part of the ‘Baritone-Bass Approach.’ (Phillips: p.80)

If the use of falsetto at this delicate time is indeed wrong, then our own choral heritage (as described by Phillips as “the English Approach” in his discussion of Contemporary Approaches to the Male Voice Change: p.78) is now - and surely has been for centuries - at risk of damaging mutating voices? As Ashley writes: “there is [still] considerable confusion caused by the fact the so-called ‘head voice’ and falsetto voice over-lap considerably.
Much ‘head voice’ singing by choristers is likely to be falsetto, particularly in the case of older boys who have passed from Cooksey’s second to third stage without giving up the treble register.” (p.53).

Christina Shewell writes that “a boy chorister required to continue singing as a soprano may well use a pattern of over-tightening and a high larynx as an unconscious compensation for unpredictability, and this should never be encouraged” (p.118). However, this practice seems to be still continuing even in light of all modern research. Ashley believes that “paradoxically, advances in modern voice science have led to less rather than more confident claims about register and passaggio, than those that are found in texts dating from what we have called the golden century” (p. 53).

This surely only contributes to the lack of clarity as regards how high boys should actually be singing. We must also consider briefly here not only the needs and desires of the choir master/choir school, but also the boys themselves. Many choristers reach the peak of their sound just before entering into vocal mutation. They are adored by all who hear them and for many this aura of success can be exceptionally difficult to give up. For these boys there is no choice to stop singing potentially damaging higher vocal parts, because simply put, not to sing them means the end of the voice and their extraordinary vocal journey. A small number, such as Aled Jones, make the successful transition from ‘amazing choir boy’ to ‘successful adult singer’. In these cases, it is often the boy himself who desperately tries to continue singing the upper line, rather than be relegated to a lower part or have to leave the choir, and far worse, to watch while another, younger, boy takes his place. In terms of image in relation to singing, this would be for many too much to bear.

It was while attending a recent conference (with the Association Of Teachers Of Singing), about boys’ voices, that this question was raised. The discussion was interesting, with many practitioners believing vehemently that young boys should take up a lower part straight away, in order to avoid
vocal damage. It was agreed by the delegates and the speaker (Linda Hutchinson) that no vocal damage would be done in exploring this lower area of the voice and in fact, Hutchinson believed a better vocal health and development may result from this earlier exploration. The problem arises of course, if the boy concerned does not want to explore this lower register, and the psychological effect of lowering the music against his wishes may stop him from wanting to continue singing. Whilst there are many factors to consider in this debate - such as the onset of vocal problems and psychological vocal issues such as puberphonia - I feel there is no clear cut line. How do we best guide the young boy who does not want to explore the lower register of his voice? Or the boy who wants to sing countertenor and nothing else?

**Stage three: 2 - 4 months**

"Stage three is the most vulnerable stage, when the voice can be easily damaged and is open to abuse... This is the stage where you find the cracking, plummeting and squeaking effects often associated with voice change." (Trundle p.9). During this stage, the vocal tessitura remains more consistent, although the whole range descends. Typically, the extended ‘safe’ vocal range now lies between D2 and F#3, and the expected minimum modal range is F#2 to D3.

**Stage four: 6 - 9 months**

“The more dramatic aspects of growth are now finished.” (Trundle p. 10). During this stage the vocal tessitura begins to extend again. The upper partial still lowers slightly, but the descent of the lower partial allows the range to extend downwards. Typically, the extended ‘safe’ vocal range now lies between B2 and Eb3, and the minimum expected modal range is Eb2 to Bb3.
It is during this stage that the voice begins to regain stability, with greater resonance and harmonics. “It is generally too soon to tell what range the adult voice will be able to access.” (Trundle p.10).

**Stage five: Onwards through life!**

During this stage, the vocal tessitura extends again. There is a small amount of decent by the top partial, with a further extension downwards by the lower partial. The voice now begins to settle, with the extended ‘safe’ range typically lying between G2 and D4, and the minimum expected modal range being B3 - G#3.

“At this stage the adult range is approximated but the fullness of an adult tone is not yet complete.” (Trundle p.11). Trundle offers warning to teachers that “Each singer should be treated individually... [and] the teacher should [not] be too quick to label the voice as tenor or bass. He should be enjoyed for what he is - a young singer.” (p.11)

Irvin Cooper’s research and formulation of the ‘cambiata voice’ is also well worth noting. In Cooper’s research there are three vocal phases, which boys undergo between 7 years and 15+. The ‘soprano phase’ (age 7 - 12 years), which covers the unchanged voice and first stage of Cooksey’s vocal mutation in adolescents. During this phase the voice is “child-like... [with] boys and girls very similar in speech and singing.” (Ashely: p.49). The boy’s singing voice can be “full, rich [and] soprano-like in quality [which] reaches its pinnacle of beauty, power and intensity.” (Cooksey).

The ‘cambiata phase’ (age 11 - 14), covers stages 1 to 4 of Cooksey’s mutation in adolescents. It is during this phase that “boys’ and girls’ voices begin to diverge... [and] lose child-like quality.” (Ashely: p.49). Cooper claimed that the cambiata voice is “rich, undeniably masculine almost to the point of belligerency, and truly beautiful if the sound is controlled in volume and not permitted to become strident from sheer vocal exuberance.” (p.149). The final phase - ‘new baritone’ (age 15 - 18), covers
stages 3 to 5 of Cooksey’s mutation in adolescents. During this phase “most boys now have a speaking voice clearly different to girl or child.” The “singing voice [falls] roughly in baritone range but not yet settled and sounds weak and adolescent-like compared to adult voice.” (Ashley: p.49).

We must also be aware that as the voice has not yet settled, it would still be unwise to categorise it too early. As Ashley writes, the ‘new baritone’ is not necessarily the voice that will remain with the developing male. This voice could still develop to become an adult tenor or bass.

Changes which occur in girls:

Girls also experience vocal anatomical change during adolescence. While this is “not as radical a change as that of the male, [the voice] does thicken and grow in a more lateral or rounded direction... This results in a slight lowering of the speaking voice and lower extension of the singing range.” (p.83). Just as with boys, it is vital that girls are not labelled as a specific voice type at this age. Phillips discusses the damage that can be done by telling girls that they are altos, with regard to undeveloped ‘head registers’. “Unstrained, light, upper register vocalization is a must for all adolescent girls.” (Phillips p.83). In addition, just as with boys, a teacher must be aware of the psychology of the developing adolescent, in relation to their developing voice. As I have stated, this is an area which still needs further research: “How students feel about their voices during the mutation process has not been adequately addressed by the research community”. (Phillips p.85, discussing a statement by May and Williams)

It is believed that there are four stages of vocal development in adolescent girls, which “begin one to two years before the changes begin in the male voice”. (Haston: p.8).
**Stage one:**

“*The first stage of change is the pre-pubertal stage which occurs in females age eight to eleven and is characterized by a light, flute-like vocal tone*”. (Haston p.9). There is no real change in tessitura from the ‘unchanged’ state, and the voice remains at roughly Bb4 to F5, but in some cases may only be D4 to D5. “*Female voices in this stage... are able to switch between their upper and lower registers with an ease not visible in other stages of development.*” (Haston p.9).

**Stage two:**

“*The second stage of development is divided into two sections: the pubescent/ pre-menorrhoeal stage and the puberty/ post-menorrhoeal stage.*” (Haston p.9). This stage of development generally occurs between the ages of eleven and thirteen. In the tessitura, there is a slight lower extension, giving the voice a range of A4 to F5, but in some cases may only be Bb4 to Bb5. “*This stage is characterised by a breathiness in the tone and a greater difficulty in singing in the lower register.*” (Haston: p.9).

**Stage three:**

According to Gackle “*this is the peak of the mutation and is a very critical point in female vocal development, as well as physical development. This stage is the most critical because the tessitura is shortened and can... [be] unpredictable and sporadic*”. The voice is now at its most inflexible and smallest range. There is a lowering of the top pitch, giving us A4 to D5, but in some cases may remain unchanged at Bb4 to Bb5.
Stage four:

“The last stage of female adolescent vocal development is the post-menorrhoeal/ young adult stage. This stage usually begins between the ages of fourteen and sixteen and is characterised by an overall increase in vocal capability.” (Haston: p.9). There is a return of the upper part of the range A4 to F5, but in some cases may only be B4 to C5.

Due to the lesser physical growth in this area of the female anatomy, girls generally seem to travel through this area of voice change without too much difficulty, although in order to deal effectively with the multitude of changes which occur in the adolescent voice, “Gackle and others recommend constantly testing and retesting the ranges of adolescent girls.” (Haston p.19).

Whatever camp our beliefs fall into with regard to how the voice should be used during adolescence, it is clear that as practitioners working within this field, it is our duty to be fully aware of both the process and the dangers that may be associated with it, in order we can do our best by our students. Trundle states that “it is essential for the voice trainer to be aware that these stages are sequential and generally predictable.” (p.2). With careful reference to the likely changes and tessitura of each transitional stage, together with a carefully chosen repertoire, a knowledgeable practitioner can make “singing through adolescence a positive and constructive experience, technically and musically, rather than a period of disruption and frustration.” (Trundle p.2).

However, we must be aware that the physical aspect to teaching the adolescent age group is more than merely the standard associated vocal change detailed above. With this vocal alteration comes a host of emotional issues for both boys and girls, ranging from those who fear it, to those who long for it! One of the largest issues surrounding vocal change in recent years has been whether to keep adolescents singing, or allow them to rest the voice during transition. It is generally accepted nowadays that it is possible for young people to continue to sing safely through this time. In
fact, Phillip’s believes this to be “a most important consideration” (p.76). He states that “adolescent students must be kept singing throughout the early adolescent years… often this is the music teacher’s last chance to convince these students of the value of singing.” (p.76). The ‘how to’ of this can often be the crux of the problem, though. I am only too aware from experience that boys of any age are usually less likely to be involved in singing than girls. Finding ways to attract boys into the fold can be a very difficult task, no matter how much - as Phillips advises - the focus is placed on the similar “physical coordination required for athletic participation.” (p.76).

Practitioners such as Gareth Malone and his well viewed television series “The Choir”, which had a segment specifically for boys, have helped to develop this area. Other TV shows such as “Glee” have helped to highlight comparisons between singing and the arts and sports, as well as the problems associated with perceptions of ‘those who sing’ - particularly with reference to boys and the threat towards their developing masculinity. The statistics are saddening. Williams writes that research from “the 1920’s and 1930’s showed that at most only 2% of former choir boys became singers in their adult life.” (p.1).

One approach, with which some teachers have found success, is to separate adolescents during this period and have singing take place in same sex groups. The benefits of this are of course, that vocal and physical issues can be dealt with more appropriately. However, I do have to query the real success of this separation. While in the short term it makes life easier for all concerned, in the long term does it really serve to educate our youngsters about the difficulties each sex is experiencing? Without this knowledge, there can be no better understanding of each group’s specific needs, either now or in the future, and I feel sad about this. Phillips states that “an open discussion concerning the vocal parameters of vocal maturation is necessary at this age.” (p.76). I do not see why this discussion cannot happen in the presence of both sex groups and in relation to the changes both groups will
experience. By separating the groups at this time, are we not creating a lack of knowledge and understanding that will fuel embarrassment in the future? Additionally, this type of separation could have other negative effects, where the majority of time is spent working with male voices. Haston warns us: “the danger in neglecting female students in the voice change... is that female students are left to fend for themselves and often develop incorrect and harmful vocal techniques as a result of the lack of instruction.” (p.1). There are merits to both approaches and I am not sure at present which side of the fence I stand. I do believe that this is an area where further work could and perhaps should be done in order to better guide practitioners in the best interests of their students.

In addition to voice change, there are a number of other physical factors that teachers need to be aware of. Gould states, that “nowadays adolescents are treated to extensive orthodontic treatment and braces on teeth often cause problems with jaw release.” (p.181). She also states that issues with tuning and control can occur for both sexes, which can lead to issues with self-esteem. “Changes in the muscle fibre and tissues may lead to temporary intonation problems... breathiness may occur in the tonal quality because the folds are larger and may not be closing fully... [and] shyness about using the voice may cause a lack of energy and poor breath control.” (p.181). In all of these issues, the approach taken by the teacher will make or break the future of the youngster in question and so it is imperative that a well informed path is taken, especially as regards the correct choices of repertoire and exercises. As Phillips states, “song texts must be chosen carefully to reflect the needs and interests of adolescents.” (p.76).

It is this sense of developing identity that teachers must harness when selecting repertoire for singing. The Music Manifesto of 2006 states that “by the age of 11, many young people are making their own decisions about the music they want to hear and play and when and how they want to do it.” (p.48). When selecting repertoire, teachers must consider
carefully the physical and emotional needs of their students. It is sad that this is not always the case. As a result of his in-depth research with choristers during adolescence, Ashley writes that “surprisingly little attention has been paid in the UK to the problem of finding songs pitched in the ranges that follow the gradual fall of pitch of the speaking voice.” (p.47). Whether this problem occurs because traditionally, choir masters are organists rather than vocal specialists I do not know. In the United States, where the pedagogy of vocal education far surpasses our own (despite our rich choral heritage), this difficulty is not the case. There, “where the work of John Cooksey seems better known” (Ashley: p.47), other practitioners such as Irvin Cooper have been able to influence vocal teaching greatly. In the States, Cooper’s research led to the development of the term ‘cambiata voice’ and the “fundamental precept of cambiata singing [which] is that the song should fit the voice, not the voice the song.” (Ashley: p.48). I am pleased to hear more and more that choir masters are calling upon the expertise of singing teachers, to help with the transition of the adolescent voice during this period and in the recent press release by the AOTOS that they will be soon publishing selections of material suitable for each stage of the changing voice for both boys and girls, in order that as practitioners we really can work towards the ideal of the ‘cambiata approach’.

Developing an Appropriate Pedagogy:

Pedagogical approaches such as Paul Harris’ ‘4P’s’ allow us to ensure that we are covering the most important areas within our teaching. I would like to add to this Haston’s referral to McKinney’s “three D’s: Detect/ Diagnose symptoms, Determine causes, Devise a plan of action.” (p.7). Working with both these concepts in mind encourages the teacher constantly to assess the progression of teaching and learning both during and between sessions in order to better meet the needs of the student.
The most effective teaching for any age group might then look something like:

**APPROACHES TO TEACHING MUSIC (4 P’S/ 3 D’S)**

1. **STUDENTS’ PHYSICAL & EMOTIONAL NEEDS**
2. **APPROPRIATE SELECTION OF KNOWLEDGE OF REPERTOIRE/ MATERIAL INDIVIDUAL NEEDS**

Having already discussed two of the three parts to this pyramid, I will now refer to the important aspects of approaches to teaching when working with adolescents.

**Teaching Music Musically:**

One of the most important lessons I have ever learned as a teacher, is that music teaches music. Talking does not teach! (It is in fact, a Kodaly motto to ‘talk less – sing more’!) As teachers, I believe it is easy to sometimes become carried away with our ability to impart knowledge to students. The reality is however, that we are not an oracle and although we do have sound ideas to teach our students, we must find the most effective methods of imparting this knowledge. With specific reference to adolescents, it is important to get into the ‘doing’ rather than wasting time with explanations. This way you are much more likely to successfully teach to the learning needs of the student(s) at hand. Howard Gardener's *learning styles*, to which Harris refers have become a central component in structuring learning in schools around the country. They give a teacher an
effective ‘toolkit’ with which to approach the tuition of any student, in order to ensure that the learning experience is pitched correctly (whether that might be that a more visual, auditory or kinaesthetic approach). I believe, however, that kinaesthesia is a sound approach for all regardless of preferred learning style, particularly with younger students. Physicalising the experience and then making it conscious through explanations which ‘join the dots’ are often much more appealing and much more effective.

Harris advocates a very active, musical approach to teaching. He writes that “students must always be encouraged to be creative” (p.11) and should therefore be given ample opportunity to explore improvisation and compositional tasks, right from the beginning. This allows us to teach students that music is after all a living thing. It is of the moment, personal to them and something they can take ownership of. Harris warns against too much ‘tutor book teaching’, where the focus of both teacher and student remains in the pages of a book from lesson to lesson. Music must be more than the ‘dots on a page’ and we must enthuse our younger students in order to keep them motivated to learn. Vocally, this is slightly harder than with an instrument for obvious reasons. However, it is possible to develop a regime of vocal improvisation during each session by incorporating small riffs and ostinati into warm-up sessions, building confidence and getting the creativity flowing.

I have on a number of occasions improvised with random sounds from body percussion, to vocal sound effects (e.g. imitating traffic or somesuch), to drum kit sounds - anything to show that improvisation is not a talent only given to the privileged few, but one which can be accessed and enjoyed by all. Improvisation through movement in response to the music being studied, or other musical stimulus, is also an extremely effective learning tool, and students can benefit greatly from learning in a different context. These shapes and patterns can then be fed back into vocal improvisations. This may be more difficult with adolescents. Gentle encouragement and demonstration will allow them to gain some of the important benefits of
this approach. Coordination problems can also be addressed during this type of movement, benefiting general adolescent development issues. Angela Caine’s voice gym programme has a wonderful source of vocal and movement material to develop coordination, voice and expression.

**Being aware of the student: What they think and feel:**

Harris warns against making assumptions: “*When a pupil does something correctly, we may be forgiven for assuming that they’ve understood it.*” (p.51). It is particularly important in those first lessons to revisit and reinforce concepts throughout the lesson. The 4 P’s for example should be found in everything from warm ups to teaching material and then again in the cool down and practise directions. By giving students multiple opportunities to experience concepts in different situations, we are ensuring that the learning is successful. Harris states that ideas “*successfully learnt means a pupil can recognise, understand and apply in any situation.*” (p.51). We can do this by following Harris’ simple steps, placing the teaching/learning experience into different contexts. For example, I recently gave a coaching session to a student auditioning for a show. The piece was in common time, but had regular crotchet triplets. These needed to be taught in the following ways:

- Modelling (memory): the student hears and imitates
- Aural: the student hears rhythms performed by me and copies (practising the rhythm and timing)
- In movement: moving to rhythms above with the whole body
- Pulse: placing rhythms against a metronome/ in their hands whilst maintaining the pulse in their feet.
- Improvisation: using the rhythm in a new creative situation
- Theoretically: teaching subdivisions
• Writing: dictation - the student writes down the rhythm

• Asking questions to check understanding and whether student can verbalise (in my experience younger students are often quite able to demonstrate musical concepts. For example “can you tell me what pulse is?” - the reply is a demonstration of steady beat marking. However, many are unable to verbalise the explanation and reply with “don’t know”. It is therefore not fully understand or assimilated. Teachers need to mix questioning with practical work to ensure understanding on all levels.

• Application: perform other musical pieces which have triplet rhythms.

On the subject of assumptions made between teacher and student, Harris states that “the list is virtually infinite.” (p.54). He lists a number of possibilities, which may frequently occur, where it is easy for a teacher to assume that the student should understand something. A great deal of confusion results from semantics and this is particularly true of music, where different teachers use different terminology (American, English, French, Italian) and in a world where language is used incorrectly in descriptions. A common misconception I come across with regard to dynamics, is students believing that the music goes ‘up and down’. Of course the terminology we are looking for is that dynamics can be louder or quieter, but in the context of the world outside the classroom, dynamics do go ‘up and down’. I very often hear people say ‘turn the volume up!’ Musically, as teachers we know that only pitch can rise and fall, however, we must be careful not to make these assumptions of knowledge with our students. Time taken to explain carefully the correct meaning will ensure less confusion at a later date. The same is of course true in reverse. Our students will often assume that we understand exactly what they mean, because they do! The language that passes between both student and teacher during the teaching session must be appropriate and meaningful,
and this is again testament to the importance of developing a secure relationship with students, based on the pyramid model given earlier.

When working with adolescents it can also be lack of language which becomes the issue. As experienced practitioners, with knowledge of our students, we need to be able to also pick up on the non-verbal communication present. We must be able to recognise the signs of anxiety: (forgetting music, turning up late, excuses, engaging in distracting chatter, desiring to leave early, avoiding eye contact, body language). When I attended the Teacher Training course run by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, it was stated that “not practising is commonly an indication of anxiety. The fear of not being able to do it can make the pupil feel it’s preferable not to try... than fail.” (p.9) Our use of language towards students must also be carefully chosen. We must have an awareness of the power of praise and criticism and most importantly be aware of ‘received feeling or counter transference’. If we feel negative about something as teachers, we may subconsciously be passing this onto our students.

Motivation:

Motivation is an important part of teaching, particularly musically, as we see our students so little and require them to do so much alone. The moments where a student discovers they can do something without a teacher standing next to them are the most valuable of all. The acquisition of true musical independence reflects progression as a musician and technician, and begins a cycle of desire for further learning. Keeping the energy of the lesson vibrant is an important factor, which Harris focuses on as ‘five environmental principles’ (p.15), stating that all lessons should:

1. Be fun and pleasurable
2. Be creative
3. Include the importance of regular practice
4. Rely on self evaluation
5. Develop a love for performing

These are of course important concepts to consider, both in terms of the lesson and its individual outcome, but also in terms of the success of a teacher’s private practice - where lack of fun and pleasure may result in a lack of students! Fun and creativity need to be balanced well. Lessons need teaching to occur and cannot therefore be a period of banter and joking without any consistency (although of course a good relationship with students, which includes joking and banter, is very beneficial to fun and creativity)! I refer back to the importance of building secure relationships. Enjoyment and creativity can - and often do, in this type of environment - also stem from appropriate challenge. As Harris states: “when pupils are having fun, their motivation is high and their confidence grows.” (p.9). He believes that students can fall into a number of different states of mind during the learning process, and the most important of these are ‘knowing’ (knowing how to do something and being happy about it) or ‘believing’ (not knowing how to do something yet, but believing they can and will be able to do so soon).

Keeping students within these two parameters can be a difficult balancing act for teachers, but having a good knowledge of your student will help a great deal in this area. One of my own students, for example, has a tendency to be a little too negative at times, and it is here that I need to make her aware of why and how she is successful at something, rather than just attempting to pacify her. This ensures she realises (knows) that she is actually making progress and why, but also that I instil within her the belief that she can move forwards, if she simply does X, Y or Z. Then she begins to believe it is possible, becomes better energised and inspired to learn, and stands a much better chance of being successful within her own practise.
Working within Vygotsky’s developmental theory, the zone of proximal development occurs when a student demonstrates that he or she is ready to move forward. It is then that the teacher’s role is to take the student comfortably to the next appropriate level.

Everything discussed above will help to ensure motivation with students of any age. Good choices of repertoire, engaging teaching which makes meaningful connections and which is built on sound, progressive technique (Harris’ 4 P’s), together with an understanding of the student’s needs, all create motivation. Good direction in practise is also key to maintaining levels of motivation. As teachers we need to understand that adolescents have multiple interests, not all of which are musical. We need to be understanding as they find their way through a new section of their lives.

We can see that teaching singing to the adolescent age range (or any age range for that matter!) is not a straight forward process, but one that nevertheless can be filled with rewards for both teacher and student. A teacher must be equipped with a multi-faceted toolkit in order to be effective when teaching. This must include vocal skill and a knowledge of teaching the fundamentals of singing, but in addition teachers must also have the specialist knowledge required to achieve safe success for the age range that they are working with, and an appropriate repertoire of material to captivate, enthuse and motivate students. Above all they must have a secure teaching pedagogy - a knowledge of ‘how’ to teach, not simply what to teach. The advice given by Harris in his text allows practitioners to ensure that they are structuring programmes which will keep the next generation playing and singing.

“Our challenge is to help young voices develop to their fullest present potential for personal self-expression. We must facilitate their vocal future rather than hinder that development or contribute to feelings of lifelong vocal inadequacy. We must also help students to understand that each voice is unique - that it grows or develops uniquely.” (Gackle, 1991)
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