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Singing As Medicine: The Power of Vocal Expression & Its Implications in Education

Singing, the vocal production of musical tones, is a universal, ancient, and powerful practice that humanity has depended on for millennia. Modern scientific research now validates what humans have intuitively known for centuries: singing provides profound benefits to the physical body, emotional well-being, mental function, and much more. Despite its transformative effects, singing education in the United States is very much lacking, leaving many young people without access to its joyful, therapeutic, and community-building effects. This paper explores the multifaceted benefits of singing and highlights how addressing the gaps in music education, where singing resides, can create opportunities for mass healing and increased consciousness.

The voice is the original musical instrument, predating the emergence of spoken language. Every culture on Earth includes singing, whether the purpose is to foster community, promote healing, entertain, worship, seek higher guidance, or access to non-ordinary states of consciousness. The humans before us did not need scientific evidence to know that singing has a host of physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health benefits. Today, there is research that validates these benefits, proving that singing is an original healing salve that has sustained and united people across the world for centuries.

Physically, singing is calming, immunoprotective, and resilience-strengthening. Singing naturally forces one to control the breath and elongate the exhale, which activates the parasympathetic nervous system (our rest-and-digest mode). It also downregulates the sympathetic nervous system (our fight-or-flight response). Research shows that singing increases airflow to the upper respiratory tract and boosts immune health, decreasing the risk of infection. Over time, singing teaches one to breath deeply, increasing oxygen intake and lung

capacity - all beneficial for maintaining respiratory health. Additionally, singing stimulates the vagus nerve, a key component of the parasympathetic nervous system, and thereby provides a calming effect; studies show that those with greater vagal tone, a marker of stress vulnerability and reactivity, have greater resilience and lesser reactivity when dealing with stress. Singing also lowers cortisol, the stress hormone, and studies show that singing helps alleviate chronic pain, holding promise as a pain-relief intervention.

Singing elevates emotions, as humans have known for ages. Singing releases endorphins and oxytocin, the love/bonding hormone that we feel when we cuddle our pets, or hold a baby; all make singing a very pleasurable experience. This additionally helps explain why singing has been shown to reduce anxiety and improve depression & feelings of loneliness. Thanks to the endorphin release, those engaging in singing get a rush of confidence, feel good emotions, and increased energy. Additionally, singing allows one to express emotions in a healthy way, and empowers the singer by raising self-esteem; by learning a new skill, connecting with others, and performing, one can begin to believe more in themselves and in their personal power. Furthermore, singing increases neuroplasticity and brings one into a mindful state- by focusing on so many different elements (body mechanics, pitch, melody, harmonizing, etc.), singers get out of their analytical minds and into a very present state, which also reduces stress and increases the feeling of peace within.

On an energetic level, vocal vibration clears stuck energy, whether it's from trauma, stress, other people's energy, or a myriad other causes. The sounds we make when singing loosen psychophysical obstructions, so that we can become more of our true, light-filled selves. The chakra system responds positively to singing, becoming more balanced in response to authentic, joyful expression. The more balanced our chakras are, the more happy, peaceful, healthy we are, as they are connected to our endocrine glands and organs, emotional, mental, and light bodies. Singing particularly empowers the throat chakra, the chakra of personal

expression, and roots us in the present moment, calming our minds so that we can access our intuition with greater ease.

Clearly, singing is an incredible tool for individual and collective healing as well as raising consciousness. Moreover, it's free, accessible to almost everyone, and quite simply, our birthright to use our voices for pleasure, healing, and expression. I didn't start nurturing my love for singing until I was 32 years old, and I can personally attest to the many benefits named above. The more I've become immersed in it, the more I've met folks who either sing and love it, or "wish" they could sing, because they love it. The truth is that most adults want to free their voice (if they haven't already), but there are cultural, psychological, and personal barriers that often prevent them from embracing it. It would be truly powerful for children, from pre-K up through high school, to be exposed to singing from a young age to reap the benefits of this incredible medicine.

Normalizing singing and vocal expression from a young age would be a transformative step in creating healing on various levels for the collective. Unfortunately, the current state of music education, including singing instruction, for public school students in the United States is rather bleak. While 41 states require schools to include arts education, only 17 of those states have programs with deliberate assessment policies; 27 of 50 states consider art to be a core subject, while Alaska, Colorado, Hawaii, Michigan, and D.C. have no arts education requirements at any learning level (Wikipedia.com). Specifically in California, the state Education code requires that all students receive "sequential, standards-based courses in dance, music, theatre and visual arts, [but] only 11 percent of school leaders said their schools offered all four — the same percentage as in 2006" (Publications.csba.org). Inadequate funding is the most significant barrier to improving arts education, while many schools also suffer from a lack of qualified staff and competing priorities. Unfortunately, schools serving low-income families and majority students of color populations dealt with greater barriers to increasing arts education. Schools in affluent communities were 10x more likely to rely on parent groups to fund

arts educations, compared to schools in California's least affluent communities. As you can see, there are many systemic barriers to bring music and singing education into mainstream education.

I researched this topic for my final Sound Healing Certification paper because singing (as an adult) changed my life: it is a powerful yet accessible healing and consciousness-raising tool for the collective. I wanted to find out whether singing in schools is at all standard, and I was disappointed but not surprised to learn that it is not. I only researched public schools, and I surmise that private schools will have greater opportunities for singing and music education. I found that there are some music nonprofits, like Save the Music and the National Association for Music Education, that advocate for more robust music education in U.S. schools. Based on my cursory search, I discovered more nonprofits in the U.K., such as Independent Society of Musicians and Sing Up Foundation, that campaign specifically for increased singing opportunities in schools.

In conclusion, singing has been a fundamental part of the human experience for millenia, creating opportunities for healing, grieving, celebrating, and awakening. Its power is undeniable, and today's science validates what the humans before us have known- singing is medicine. This medicine is our innate birthright, yet many adults and children never learn how to sing, and lack the opportunity to express vocally, for many reasons. In an ideal world, the education system would teach singing to kids, in an effort to support creative development, teach emotional expression & intelligence, create community and bonding, build confidence and musical skills, increase neuroplasticity, and improve physical health. While this is not the current state of affairs, I have hope that one day singing and vocal expression will return to the pedestal it deserves.

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