Examining How Voice Teachers Influence Student Achievement

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INTRODUCTION

STUDIES DEFINING THE QUALITIES of the expert voice teacher predominantly have focused on the attributes, behaviors, and practices of classical voice teachers,[1] but seldom have associations been made between voice teacher expertise and the success of their students. This is important to consider, as the quality of a voice teacher is believed to be proven by the quality of the students they produce.[2] The present study examines different attributes and characteristics of expert voice teachers—specifically background and experience, as well as psychological components, including empathy and leadership—in order to determine precisely what influences student success. The majority of existing studies defining the qualities of expert voice teachers are exclusive to the classical music genre only,[3] even though research indicates a greater demand for contemporary styles of singing in music tuition.[4] Thus, this study investigates classical and music theater voice teachers as the overlap in their pedagogic roots makes them optimal for comparative analysis.[5]

Expert voice teachers are characterized by having extensive teaching and performing experience.[6] Training strongly influences the voice teacher's practices as they replicate pedagogic concepts, such as technical exercises, learned during their own experiences as voice students.[7] Further, experts hone skills through teaching a variety of students over a number of years,[8] as well as through first-hand knowledge and experience in the professional performing arts industry.[9] Adapting teaching practices to facilitate the individual needs of singing students is another characteristic of the expert voice teacher.[10] However, while little is said about *how* teachers actually determine the individual needs of their singing students, psychological aspects of the voice teacher's approach are said to facilitate the individual singer's development. Cognitive, social, physiological, and developmental psychology are considered central to voice pedagogy.[11] For example, voice teachers need to be able to diagnose vocal problems,[12] find solutions sensitively and ethically,[13] and navigate psycho-emotional issues that can impinge upon a singer's development.[14] Thus, effective communication is a fundamental concern of voice pedagogy as talking openly while establishing trust is vital to student success.[15] The way in which voice teachers communicate has the power to not only facilitate student learning, but to compel behavior.[16]

Accordingly, the psychological aspects of voice teacher practices resemble empathy, the ability to understand and adopt another's perspective,[17] and transformational leadership, the ability to motivate others and facilitate their individual interests.[18] Investigating empathy and leadership in voice teachers could offer greater understanding as to how they target individual student needs.

Empathy in Teachers

Teacher empathy is considered to be one of the most important emotional characteristics of teachers, particularly in that it facilitates promoting a positive learning environment, inclusivity, and both trust and comfort.[19] Earning trust allows the teacher to better cater to the student's intellectual and social needs in learning.[20] Thus, teacher empathy is a professional asset,[21] as it is likely to improve teacher effectiveness.[22] The results of empathic teaching impacts student development, student learning and engagement, student achievement, and student well-being.[23] For example, in investigating the influence empathy has on student motivation and achievement, Cooper notes that empathy developed over time through intimate, frequent interactions facilitates "personal, social, moral and academic development" in learning environments. Further, empathy generates positive emotions and enriches a sense of self in the students.[24]

Voice teachers need empathy in order to train their students for the physical and psychological rigors of performing.[25] Empathetic voice teacher practices include responding to an individual student's development with appropriate knowledge of acoustics and physiology,[26] understanding as to how the student feels when they sing,[27] and perspective-taking in order to establish a warm and encouraging learning environment.[28] Helding recommends that voice teachers utilize empathy to ensure students they care about them, as "much of [voice teachers'] success hinges on our ability to empathize with students, and the degree to which our students believe we care about them is directly proportional to how well they will follow our recommendations for the tools of success, like regular practice and physical exercise."[29] Callaghan notes that many Australian voice teachers spoke of a need for empathy in their teaching practices.[30] However, while it is evident that teacher empathy is good for developing relationships, and that empathy in voice teachers is essential to their pedagogy, no research to date concludes how empathetic teaching practices account for student success, nor the influence that voice teacher empathy has on student learning outcomes.

Transformational Leadership in Teachers

Bass's theoretical framework defines transformational leaders as motivational role models, intellectually stimulating followers by catering to their self-interests on an individual level and supporting them in pursuit of an inspiring goal/vision.[31] In education research, transformational teaching affects student motivation through inspiration and enthusiasm, thus greatly impacting student academic performance.[32] It also supports and enhances student learning and is a predictor of student learning outcomes.[33] For example, Pounder's comprehensive review of transformational leadership outcomes in a classroom context indicates that it "stimulates academic motivation, engagement and effort, fosters students' intentions to engage in instructional activities in their own time, engenders student self-efficacy and facilitates cognitive and affecting learning."[34]

Bass also identifies charisma as a part of his transformational leader framework. Charisma is characterized as the manner in which a leader acts as a role model, generating pride, confidence, and loyalty through concern and consideration of the follower's needs.[35] Some studies of leadership in education and music refer to charisma as a behavioral aspect of transformational leadership, specifically with regard to idealized influence.[36] For example, Waters-Bailey identified charisma as an "emotional" element of transformational leaders through their demonstration of high moral and ethical standards.[37] The majority of research on transformational leadership in music targets conductors for whom charisma is considered the most important aspect of transformational leadership.[38] This is because charismatic conductors communicate their vision of the orchestra, stress the intrinsic value of the musician's efforts and goal accomplishments, and increase individual and collective self-efficacy.[39] However, while the merits of leadership in music and education are evident, there is a dearth of knowledge as to how teacher leadership influences student outcomes specifically in individual singing tuition.

AIMS

The present study investigated associations between classical and music theater voice teachers' empathy, leadership, training, and experience, and their students' performing achievements. In particular, it aimed to consider the proportion in variance in student performing achievement that can be accounted for by psychological variables (e.g., teacher empathy and leadership) and by voice teacher experience (e.g., number of years teaching and number of students) and achievement (e.g., performing and teaching). This study also aimed to determine if the teachers' instruction genre (e.g., classical, music theater, both) influenced student performing achievement.

METHOD

Participants

In total, 147 teachers completed the survey, 84% of whom (*N=123*) resided in Australia. As systematic approaches to singing teaching are unique to different locations and cultures,[40] participants who resided outside Australia (*N=24*) were excluded from the current data analyses in order to target a particular, representative cohort. Of the 123 Australian voice teacher participants, there were 95 females (77%), 27 males (22%), and one nonbinary participant (1%). Participant ages ranged from 26–78 years old (M = 48.23, Mdn = 47.50, SD = 12.09). There were 23 classical (18%) teachers, 32 music theater (26%) teachers, 61 teachers (50%) who identified as teaching both classical and music theater, and seven teachers (6%) who did not indicate their teaching genre. Participants had between 1–50 years of teaching experience (M = 20.23, Mdn = 19.00, SD = 11.34).

The Human Research Ethics Committee at The University of Melbourne approved this research (ID: 1750622.1). Recruitment included purposively sampling voice teachers between July-December 2018. Recruitment methods included approaching individual Australian voice teachers directly via email, distributing the survey to members of the Australian National Association of Teachers of Singing and the Australian Voice Association also via email, and two digital newsletters (that of a voice journal and the Association of Music Educators Incorporated). Additionally, snowball sampling was used such that participants were asked to share the research opportunity with their colleagues.

Materials

This study used an online quantitative survey distributed by Qualtrics, an online platform for conducting survey research. The first part of the survey included two standardized measures: the Empathy Components Survey[41] and the Leadership Scale for Sports.[42] A Qualtrics function randomized the order in which the two measures appeared, as well as the order of the questions in the measures themselves, to mitigate order effects. In the second part, participants were asked to respond to a series of questions concerning themselves, as well as their teaching, performing, and students.

The Empathy Components Questionnaire. Participant empathy was measured using the Empathy Components Questionnaire (ECQ).[43] The ECQ was chosen because it clearly defines the multidimensional construct of empathy, reflects current theories of empathy, is derived from seven well validated and often used empathy surveys, and uses positively and negatively worded questions in order to deter social desirability bias.[44] It is a self-report, 30-item scale (e.g., "I do well at noticing when one of my friends is uncomfortable"; "I take an interest in looking at both sides to every argument"; "When I do things, I like to take others' feelings into account"). Participants were asked to respond using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*disagree strongly*) to 4 (*agree strongly*). A composite "empathy" score was computed for participants by calculating a mean score of their responses to the 30 items of the ECQ, such that demonstrating higher levels of empathy is indicated by a higher score.

The Leadership Scale for Sports.[45] As no existing measure of leadership in voice teaching was available, an established measure from the sports domain was used, as singers have been compared to athletes and their teachers to coaches (and both spend many hours training and preparing for competitions and performances).[46] Thus, the Leadership Scale for Sports (LSS) was selected because it is a popular survey for measuring the leadership behaviors of coaches,[47] is "applicable to a variety of leadership roles (e.g., coach, athletes, military),"[48] and recent research employing this measure supports modifying the measure to suit research aims.[49] The LSS is a

TABLE 1. Promax Rotated Factor Structure of the Amended Leadership Scale.

Survey Item	Factors			
	1[a]	2[b]	3[c]	4[d]
I give specific instructions to each student as to what he/she should do in every situation.	0.715			
I pay special attention to correcting students' mistakes.	0.709			
I explain to every student what he/she should and should not do.	0.670			
I figure ahead on what should be done.	0.491			
I explain how a student's contribution fits into the whole picture.	0.323			
I help the students with their personal problems.		0.782		
I encourage the student to confide in me.		0.631		
I help students settle their conflicts.		0.470		
I look out for the personal welfare of the students.		0.454		
I see to it that our efforts are coordinated.			1.011	
I specify in detail what is expected of each student.			0.529	
I expect every student to carry out his/her assignment to the last detail.			0.401	
I see to it that every student is working to his/her capacity.			0.380	
I express appreciation when a student performs well.				0.645
I give credit when credit is due.				0.589
I tell a student when he/she does a particularly good job.				0.541
Eigenvalue	5.038	2.476	1.834	1.580
% Variance Explained	20.151	9.905	7.337	6.318
Cronbach's alpha	.692	.730	.694	.562

Note. [a] = "Instruction"; [b] = "Social Support"; [c] = "Training Facilitation"; [d] = "Positive Feedback." Factor loadings < .300 have been suppressed.

self-report measure consisting of 40 items divided into five subscales: Training and Instruction, Democratic Behavior, Autocratic Behavior, Social Support, and Positive Feedback. In the present study, the 25 questions pertaining to the Training and Instruction (12 items), Social Support (eight items), and Positive Feedback (five items), subscales were used (because the Democratic and Autocratic subscales appeared to relate more to group learning rather than to the one to one learning environment of the voice lesson, they were excluded). Training and Instruction items explore how the coach's behavior and training improves the athlete's performance, Social Support refers to how the coach's behavior focuses on the athlete's personal needs, and Positive Feedback as how the coach rewards athletes for their performance.[50]

The LSS language was modified so that "athlete" was replaced with "student," and "his" was replaced with "his/her." For example, "I see to it that every athlete is

working to his capacity," was modified to read "I see to it that every *student* is working to *his/her* capacity." Additionally, the item "Make sure that his part in the team is understood by all the athletes" was removed, as it was considered irrelevant to the one to one aspect of vocal tuition. All of the measure items can be found in Table 1. Participants were asked to indicate their response on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*).

In the present study, the structure of the 25 LSS items was examined through principal axis factor analysis with promax rotation. Four factors accounting for 43.711% of the variance were identified as underlying the 25 survey items (see Table 1). The four factors reflected the categorization of the three LSS sub-scales: specifically, factor 1 reflected Instruction, factor 2 reflected Social Support, factor 3 reflected Training Facilitation, and factor 4 reflected Positive Feedback. Thus, an Instruction, Social

Support, Training Facilitation, and Positive Feedback score was computed for each participant by averaging their responses to the items that loaded onto these four factors. These scores were used in subsequent analyses.

Demographics and Teaching/Performing Experience. Participants were asked to state their gender, age, nationality, country of residence, and to indicate their teaching genre (classical, music theater, or both). Questions were constructed from previous research to ascertain teacher expertise by addressing performing achievement, teaching experience, pedagogic training and ongoing development, and student achievement.[51] Participants were asked to indicate their highest performing achievements from the following nine items: Won an international competition; Won a national competition; Employed at a major opera house; Employed at a B-grade opera house; Toured commercially with a major musical; Performed in high-level commercial theater (e.g., Broadway, West End, etc.); Signed with a performing agency; Been professionally recorded; Graduated university with honors (see Endnote). A total "teacher performing achievement score" was created for subsequent analyses by summing the total number of items a participant ticked. For this score, responses were equally weighted such that the higher the number of performing achievements the participant ticked, the higher the total score (ranging from 0–9).

Two questions were designed based on previous research recognizing voice teacher experience through conducting master classes and adjudicating competitions.[52] Specifically, participants were asked to indicate whether they had run master classes/workshops (yes/no) and adjudicated competitions/eisteddfods (yes/no). A total "teacher teaching achievements score" was created for subsequent analysis by summing the positive responses to these two questions (0–2). These responses were equally weighted. Participants were also asked to estimate how many students they have taught specifically at the tertiary level and to indicate how many years they had been teaching.

Lastly, participants were asked to indicate their students' highest performing achievements by ticking any that applied from the same list used to indicate teacher achievement: Won an international competition; Won a national competition; Employed at a major opera house; Employed at a B-grade opera house; Toured commercially with a major musical; Performed in high level commercial theater (e.g., Broadway, West End, etc.); Signed with a performing agency; Been professionally recorded; Graduated university with honors. A total "student achievement score" was created for subsequent analyses, determined by the number of achievements the participant ticked. Thus, the variable for student performing achievements comprised of nine equally weighted items, ranging from 0–9, such that a higher score indicated greater student achievement.

Procedure

Individuals accessed the survey via a direct web link to the plain language statement. Once participants indicated consent, they completed the survey as a series of webpages. Participation was estimated to take no more than 20 minutes. Upon completion, participants were redirected to a debriefing statement and were asked to share the survey link with anyone they thought would be interested in participating.

RESULTS

All quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software (version V26). Table 2 outlines the sample's characteristics.

Student Achievement and Teacher Empathy and Leadership

To estimate the proportion in variance in student achievement that can be accounted for by psychological variables (i.e., teacher empathy, instruction, social support, training facilitation, and positive feedback), a standard multiple regression analysis was performed. In combination, leadership and empathy accounted for 13% of the variability in student achievement, adjusted $R^2 = .08$, $F (5, 104) = 3.10$, $p = .012$; $f^2 = .15$. As seen in Table 3, facilitated training and giving positive feedback were significantly, positively associated with a greater number of student performing achievements.

Student Achievement and Teacher Experience and Achievement

A second standard multiple regression analysis estimated the proportion in variance in student achievement accounted for by voice teacher experience (i.e., number

TABLE 2. Sample Characteristics.

Sample		Age	Empathy	Instruction	Social Support	Training Facilitation	Positive Feedback	Teacher Teaching Achievements Score	Teacher Performing Achievements Score	Student Performing Achievements Score
Classical[a]	M	51.86	3.31	3.93	3.02	4.22	4.84	1.61	3.09	3.30
	Mdn	50.50	3.27	4.00	3.00	4.25	5.00	2.00	3.00	2.00
	SD	12.07	0.20	0.56	0.69	0.57	0.36	0.72	1.50	2.88
Music Theater[b]	M	43.91	3.34	3.64	3.17	4.08	4.80	1.38	2.78	3.16
	Mdn	45.00	3.40	3.70	3.25	4.25	5.00	1.50	2.00	3.00
	SD	11.01	0.24	0.68	0.67	0.63	0.38	0.71	1.98	2.17
Classical and Music Theater[c]	M	49.08	3.33	3.89	3.11	4.23	4.81	1.43	3.07	3.92
	Mdn	50.00	3.67	4.00	3.25	4.25	5.00	2.00	3.00	4.00
	SD	12.23	0.28	0.58	0.71	0.50	0.29	0.72	2.08	2.72

[a] N = 23 (82.60% female, 17.40% male).
[b] N = 32 (71.90% female, 28.10% male).
[c] N = 61 (75.40% female, 23.00% male).

of years teaching and number of students) and achievement (i.e., performing and teaching). In combination, teaching achievements and experience accounted for 59% of the variability in student achievement, adjusted $R^2 = .58$, $F (4, 106) = 38.45$, $p < .001$; $f^2 = 1.45$. As indicated in Table 4, student achievement was significantly, positively associated with teaching achievements (both performing and teaching) as well as with the number of students taught.

Student Achievement and Teaching Genre

A one-way between groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) examined how the teachers' instruction genre (i.e., classical, music theater, both) influenced the total student performing achievement score variable. The ANOVA was statistically nonsignificant, indicating that teaching genre was not associated with student achievement, $F(2, 113) = 1.06$, $p = .351$, $\eta^2 = .02$.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated which characteristics and attributes of classical and music theater voice teachers were associated with the performing achievements of their students. A positive association existed between teacher empathy and student achievement ($p = .060$) which supports previously published research advocating the application of empathy in classroom teaching, teacher training, and, more specifically, in teaching singing.[53] Teacher empathy may also explain how voice teachers determine and meet the individual needs of their singing students, a noteworthy finding, since targeting student needs is considered to be a characteristic of expert voice teaching.[54]

Moreover, statistically significant associations existed between student achievement and two components of teacher leadership: training facilitation and positive feedback. As these results indicate, voice teachers of successful students work hand in hand with them, facilitating their learning by coordinating their efforts and ensuring the student is working to capacity. This supports research of one to one instrumental and vocal tuition with regard to facilitating student learning.[55] For example, music teachers create an autonomous learning environment by striving not to "bombard" or impose their own, vast knowledge base on the student.[56] The

TABLE 3. Unstandardized (B) and Standardized (β) Regression Coefficients, and Squared Semi-Partial Correlations (sr^2) for Each Predictor in a Regression Model Predicting How Teacher Empathy and Leadership Influences Student Achievement.

Variable	B	95% CI	ß	sr^2
Empathy	-2.064	[-0.09, 4.21]	-0.199	.03
Instruction	-0.462	[-1.39, 0.47]	-0.107	.01
Social support	-0.295	[-1.10, 0.51]	-0.077	.00
Training facilitation	-1.628**	[0.55, 2.70]	-0.344	.08
Positive feedback	-2.014*	[-3.92, -0.11]	-0.208	.04

Note. N = 110, CI = confidence interval.
*p < .05, **p < .01.

TABLE 4. Unstandardized (B) and Standardized (β) Regression Coefficients, and Squared Semi-Partial Correlations (sr^2) for Each Predictor in a Regression Model Predicting How Teacher Experience and Achievement Influence Student Achievement.

Variable	B	95% CI	ß	sr^2
Teacher performing achievements	0.389***	[0.20, 0.58]	0.281	.07
Teacher teaching achievements	0.605*	[0.03, .1.19]	0.166	.02
Number of years teaching	0.030	[-0.03, 0.06]	0.131	.01
Number of students	0.839***	[0.54, 1.14]	0.433	.12

Note. N = 110, CI = confidence interval.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

current findings demonstrate that voice teachers do not seek to make students fully responsible for their own learning, but rather that see to it that students are carrying out their work to teacher specifications. These findings indicate that in order to produce more successful students, a well conceived and articulated vocal training process with positive feedback is the best pedagogy.

Expressing appreciation for a student's work and giving credit for a particularly good job was also associated with student success. These findings highlight a difference between vocal and instrumental tuition, as positive feedback is less prominent in research on one to one instrumental lessons. For example, Duke and Simmons specifically note that, among the piano, violin, and oboe teachers they observed, negative feedback was markedly more frequent and specific in addressing musical effects of student performance.[57] However, studies specific to voice teachers indicate that they should be encouraging in their approach,[58] which may be because voice teachers have to encourage students to communicate safely and collaboratively about their bodies and their largely invisible instrument.[59]

The present results also indicated that teacher background was significantly positively associated with the success of their students. Teachers with more successes in their performing careers had students with more performing successes in theirs. This finding supports previous assertions that exemplary voice teachers hail from professional performing backgrounds.[60] Teacher background with regard to teaching achievements was also significantly positively associated with student achievement, such that the more the teacher had achieved and participated in education processes such as adjudicating competitions, running master classes, and conducting workshops, the more their students were achieving in performance. This is different from attaining a pedagogy/performance degree or partaking in professional development. The finding suggests that students might proactively seek out the teaching services of those *running* the short courses and workshops, rather than attending them.

It is unsurprising that there was a positive association between the number of students a teacher has taught and resulting student achievement. It makes sense that the more students a teacher has, the more likely a successful student would exist among that cohort, as per Proctor who found that experts teach a variety of students over an extended period of time.[61] However, it is important to note the number of years a participant had been teaching was not a predictor of student achievement; thus, it was not the amount of time the teacher had been teaching, but rather the amount of students they had taught that best developed their pedagogic practice. As research shows, music teachers favor student-centered learning environments;[83] thus, it is possible that exposure to a higher number of students would influence a voice teacher's practices more than a learning environment that is teacher-centric. Additionally, whereas observing and analyzing best teaching practices may be the best preparation for one to one music teachers,[63] it is plausible that developing into a master teacher may occur through engaging with a higher volume of students. Therefore, the findings imply that a strong focus in voice teacher training should be to have prospective teachers work with numerous and diverse students earlier in their teaching career, as this will assist in developing a more student-centered approach.

Lastly, teaching genre did not influence student achievement, suggesting the genre in which teachers classify themselves does not impact on the performing achievements of their students (noting that half of our sample identified as teaching both classical and music theater). Thus, the distinct performing and teaching experiences of the teachers themselves are more important to student success than genre identification. This distinction is important, as exemplary singing teachers identified in academia almost always hail from a background in classical singing.[64] Current findings could encourage more diversity in the hiring practices of voice teachers in academia, particularly with a growing demand for contemporary styles of singing in music markets and instruction.[65] For example, instead of training classical voice teachers to teach belt, voice teachers who have themselves trained in contemporary methods and have performed in relevant industries could apply their own individual expertise and knowledge firsthand.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study focused on Australian voice teachers, future research should be conducted on an international scale. Such an effort would afford a larger sample with greater statistical power, and also allow for comparison of the trends noted among Australian teachers relative to teachers in different countries. Another limitation concerns the measurement of teacher and student achievement. The list of achievement criteria and how they were equally weighted may not have truly captured the entire essence of achievement in performance and pedagogy. Future qualitative investigations using face to face interviews or observations of teacher practices could validate these findings, generating a more in-depth understanding of the associations between voice teacher experience, background, engagement, and achievement. Further, as responses to this survey were self-report, observing teacher practices could provide rich data while minimizing potential bias. Future research should also consider how voice teachers train and achieve success in both their performing and teaching practices.

CONCLUSION

The present findings indicate that successful voice teachers are successful performers who have both trained extensively as teachers (irrespective of musical genre) and worked with a larger number of students. Voice teachers with successful students clearly demonstrate leadership qualities through facilitating student training and providing positive feedback as well as empathy.

The twenty-first century voice teacher is urged to consider the "whole" student,[66] how they learn, and what motivates them. Given the findings of this study, empathy and leadership training is key to developing future voice teachers. Incorporating empathy and leadership training into voice pedagogy courses could contribute to quality voice teaching practices. Further, we can hypothesize that practicing teachers who continue to focus on their own professional development as performing artists can, in turn, positively influence their student development and success. Considering the benefits to singing students, more research is warranted to discover what on-going voice teacher training would be the most useful.

Endnote

Quantifiable and objective criteria to assess performing achievements of classical and music theater teachers/students were generated based on previous literature concerning classical singers, specifically winning competitions, employment at an opera house, and performing to an international standard.[67] Some of these concepts are transferrable to music theater (i.e., opera house could equate to commercial theater). However, the following criteria were devised for music theater: 1) being professionally recorded, as "successful" American music theater was preserved through recordings, particularly cast recordings, which are of great financial investment;[68] 2) signing with an agent; and 3) graduating from a performing arts or music degree "with honors" (i.e., demonstrating achievement above an institution's criteria).

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NOTES

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I heard a thousand blended notes,
While in a grove I sate reclined,
In that sweet mood when pleasant thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind.

To her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What man has made of man.

Through primrose tufts, in that green bower,
The periwinkle trailed its wreaths;
And 'tis my faith that every flower
Enjoys the air it breathes.

The birds around me hopped and played,
Their thoughts I cannot measure—
But the least motion which they made
It seemed a thrill of pleasure.

The budding twigs spread out their fan,
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there.

If this belief from heaven be sent,
If such be Nature's holy plan,
Have I not reason to lament
What man has made of man?

William Wordsworth,
"Lines Written in Early Spring"