



Music: You *Can* Teach It!

BY CAROL (ADAMS) SWINYAR

As [Jesus] grew older He was tempted, but *the songs His mother had taught Him to sing* came into His mind, and He would lift His voice in praise. And before His companions were aware of it, they would be singing with Him.¹

It seems clear that Jesus' positive experiences of singing with His mother Mary when He was young enabled Him to sing with purpose, ease, and spontaneity as an adult. Perhaps Mary remembered the injunction of Proverbs 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go. And when he is old he will not depart from it" (NKJV).

Ellen White writes that Christ sang at home and in His workplace. He sang to celebrate the morning, to express His happy spirit, to cheer His neighbors and friends, to encourage His companions, to resist the enemy, to soothe stressful situations, and most importantly, to commune with His Father.² Matthew also recorded that Jesus sang with His disciples before He left the upper room on the Thursday night before His crucifixion.³

I, too, enjoyed music with my family as I was growing up, especially Friday evenings singing choruses and hymns with Dad at the piano. Eventually my parents' investment in piano lessons for me paid off, and I was able to take Dad's place. These musical skills developed in childhood have given me a special way to praise God, witness to others, and serve my church.

Zoltan Kodaly (1882-1967) also came from a music-loving family in Hungary. Though from a humble home, he taught himself to play the piano, violin, and cello. These early experiences were key to his becoming an accomplished composer, ethnomusicologist, and renowned music educator.

These examples show how enjoyable home-based experiences with music can shape positive attitudes and practices that carry into the adult life. Kodaly realized, however, that not all children have this advantage in their home, so he spent much of his life working to develop music education in the schools of his country.

Described by his colleagues and students as a born teacher,

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Kodaly began teaching music at the age of 25.⁴ Declaring that “music is an indispensable part of universal human knowledge,”⁵ his slogan was “Let music belong to everyone!”⁶ He believed that,

“Music is not a toy for a very few selected people... music is a spiritual food for everybody. So I studied how to make more people accessible to good music.”⁷

“There may be no genius opening up new paths among them; but even the starry skies would be dim if they were lit only by the brightest stars.”⁸

“Often a single experience will open the young soul to music for a whole lifetime. This experience cannot be left to chance; it is the task of the school to provide it.”⁹

Affirming a similar view of the importance of music in our schools, the North American Division Office of Education has created a curriculum guide with standards and performance

(i.e., as students enter, silent reading, rest time)

65 percent - daily routines (i.e., lunch prayer, welcome song, goodbye song)

42 percent - teaching concepts in an academic subject (i.e., math, writing, social studies)

35 percent - teaching of music concepts, knowledge, and skills in a regular music class

19 percent - recess or play time

Two key findings emerged from this survey:

Overall, 92 percent of the teachers surveyed placed a high priority on music as a part of their worship time. This no doubt reflected their understanding of the importance of sacred song and their comfort with singing. (Eighty-one percent described themselves moderately to very skilled in singing, marking 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale.)

However, about only one-third (35 percent) of the teachers

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expectations. The rationale of the Fine Arts K-8 Curriculum Guide is that a study of the arts supports the wholistic development recommended by Ellen White.

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To determine whether Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools offer a comprehensive music curriculum to all students, I developed a survey in 2004 on the status of music in elementary classrooms. I obtained permission to administer the questionnaire to the elementary teachers of the Southern New England Conference. Eighty-two percent of the teachers in the conference completed the form. *All* of the respondents reported that they integrated music in their classrooms, and 68 percent said they used it *daily*.

The teachers said they used music in their classrooms in the following ways:

92 percent - worship

77 percent - celebrations (i.e., birthdays, holidays)

77 percent - programs for parents, church, community

77 percent - background music

included *music education* in their classroom; that is, the teaching of music concepts, knowledge, and skills in a regular music class.

In May 2005, the same conference released the results of an educational survey conducted by the Center for Statistical Services at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. This study of the constituency of the Southern New England Conference was conducted to gather information that would help the conference department of education in future planning.



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I was particularly interested in the answers to the survey question, "How important would each of the following be in determining the quality of the school to help in selecting a school?" The highest ratings went to the impact on the morals and ethics among students and faculty, spiritual climate, qualifications of the teachers and administrators, and the quality of regular academic courses such as English, social studies, mathematics, and science (96-98 percent). And then—equal to "financial considerations" (86 percent)—was the importance placed on high-quality music and art classes.¹¹

So... the NAD school system officially includes music as part of the core curriculum, and at least some of its constituency also sees music as very important. So why isn't a higher priority placed on making music education a regular part of the curriculum in Adventist elementary schools?

Is it because resource materials are expensive, difficult to obtain, or hard to use? Do teachers need more equipment? Better undergraduate training or more teacher in-services? Supportive administrators? Or simply more time for preparation and instruction?

Since many of our schools are small and lack the financial resources to hire trained music teachers, parent or community volunteers are often used. These dedicated individuals may be helpful in putting together a choir or other type of music group for occasional performances; however, there is more to music education than "showcasing" the students on special occasions.

Using proven teaching and classroom-management strategies along with an understanding of how children learn, teachers can help students explore music concepts, develop foundational skills, and acquire broad musical knowledge. The classroom teacher must step up to fill this role. Teaching music is something that *any teacher can do*, regardless of his or her musical background. Just as in other content areas of the elementary curriculum, it is not necessary to be a specialist to teach music.

In working to keep it simple for classroom teachers to teach music, the Atlantic Union Music Curriculum Committee selected four basic components of music education to feature in the *MusicaLive!* music kit that can be represented by the acronym SLICK.¹²

The S.L.I.C.K. Way to Teach Music

S = Singing: The first place to start is with *singing*. "In every school instruction in singing is greatly needed."¹³ Singing is the best foundation for musicianship. If my conference is typical, then you are probably already singing with your students. So it is simply a matter of becoming intentional about it.

What can children sing?

- Songs of worship and praise, Scripture songs (every day);
- Great hymns of the Christian Church (learn at least one per month);
- Heritage songs of their country (learn at least one per month);
- Children's folk songs (as desired) – songs about animals, friends, family, seasons, work, adventure, history, feelings such as happiness, sadness, or love; songs that include action, make-believe, or that tell a story; and
- Songs from other cultures and countries (as desired) – such as Mexico, Africa, China, or any place that has a style is a contrast to the familiar.





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of music.”¹⁵ Children can learn many songs by rote, but much more music is accessible when they become musically literate. This includes the ability to decode the symbols representing rhythm, pitch, dynamics, and other

musical concepts and terms.

Basic rhythms are simple for primary-age children to master if you use rhythm syllables at first. Later, names (i.e., quarter note) may be given to the symbols for rhythm as needed. The children will thus learn that “reading” music involves moving the eyes from left to right just like reading a book, that sounds go low and high, and that melodies are made by stepping, skipping, and repeating sounds. They will be able to identify a familiar tune by looking at the shape of the melody line. While you are introducing instruments such as the recorder or the keyboard, teach the letter names (a-b-c-d-e-f-g) of the pitches on the staff. Both the students and teacher will be excited as the children learn to match the note they see with the correct fingering or position on the instrument. Students should also learn the symbols that mean softer or louder, faster or slower, or to repeat a section of the music. If given the opportunity to practice frequently, they will gain speed and confidence and enjoy using their newfound skills to read real music at the appropriate level.

The *MusicaLive!* music kit curriculum committee chose to recommend using the Alfred *Essentials of Music Theory 2.0* CD as part of the literacy component. With three levels of music theory learning and ear training practice, this would be helpful both for children with no prior music literacy skills and those who are more advanced, allowing them to develop at their own pace.

I = Instruments: Next, consider how you can focus on instruments. Besides telling us to sing, the psalmist (Psalm 150: 3–6) instructs everyone to praise God with a variety of instruments, the trumpet, lute (similar to a guitar), harp, tambourine, flute, strings, and cymbals.

While it is important and pleasurable for children to listen

When can children sing?

- During worship;
- As part of the school day routine;
- To teach values, rules, and procedures;
- To enhance school and/or class spirit;
- To release tension and energy at any time;
- To teach content within other subject areas (i.e., chant or sing multiplication tables);
- As part of an integrated theme unit (i.e., Native American songs as part of a social studies unit);
- To enhance holidays and celebrations; and
- To reach out to the community.

How will children sing?

- Simply, with a natural, gentle voice;
- Expressively, showing a connection between the act of singing and the meaning of the words of the song;
- Accompanied by a CD, piano, guitar, melody bells, or unpitched percussion instruments *or* unaccompanied (frequently) to allow them to really hear their own voices;
- Within a range that is comfortable (start with 5–8 notes above the middle of the piano); and
- In a non-judgmental environment, with patient encouragement for those who have not yet discovered their singing voice. (How many adults refuse to sing again because of some remark made to them when they were a child?)

“Let there be singing in the school, and the pupils will be drawn closer to God, to their teachers, and to one another.”¹⁴

L = Literacy: Next, add the teaching of music literacy skills, which will enable students to enter the world of music. “It is the right of every citizen to be taught the basic elements of music, to be handed the key with which he can enter the locked world

to the unique timbres of the various instruments, it is also important for them to actually play instruments. You can create a classroom music center with a xylophone, autoharp, ukulele, guitar, or keyboard equipped with earphones. This experimentation in the classroom may pique the children's desire to learn more about music through group or private instruction.

Unpitched percussion instruments such as tambourines, drums, triangles, maracas, etc. (1st grade and up), recorders (3rd grade and up) and handchimes or handbells (5th grade and up) are excellent instruments for groups of children to use in practicing their literacy skills. Each of these instruments, alone or in combination with the voice, may be used in the local church or community to the glory of God.

To supplement the hands-on experience, take the children on a field trip to hear a concert, or visit a symphony orchestra Website designed to acquaint young people with the musicians, their instruments, and the music they play.¹⁶

C = Classical Composers: It is important to help children to become familiar with the great art music of the world and those who created it. Appreciation for classical (or "serious") music is partly a learned response, points out author Ed Christian in his book *Joyful Noise*.¹⁷ When students become familiar with a variety of musical styles, what once seemed unattractive to them may become music to their ears. Within the world of classical music, there is a wide variety: orchestral music, string quartets and brass ensembles; opera, symphonies, and concertos; Baroque, Romantic, and Contemporary music; some loud, some soft; some relaxing, some jarring. Classical music is likely to be musically complex, often challenging the listener. Classical CDs, DVDs, videos, and books are generally available in public libraries. In addition, other excellent resources have been published, and there are many Websites where information, pictures, and sound clips may be accessed.¹⁸ Students can create drawings, collages, booklets, reflection papers, or even skits on classical music and composers.

While some great composers have inspiring life stories, the teacher must be aware that many composers did *not* live exemplary lives. The music they created, however, may still be very effective not only in the music class, but also in the classroom

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as a background to enhance unity, focus concentration, and assist with classroom decorum, or as a primer for an activity.

K = Kids: The last letter in our **S.L.I.C.K.** acronym is to remind you that as you teach music, you are teaching the same students to whom you teach math and spelling. Instructional strategies that work for other subjects will work with music, too. As you focus on music with your students, join with them in the delight of discovery. As music time becomes a memo-

orable part of your students' day, it may become a highlight of *yours* as well!

You can make it possible for every child in your classroom to experience the joy of music. This precious gift of God belongs to everyone! ✍



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The author would be pleased to hear from readers with questions, comments, ideas, or materials that they are willing to share. E-mail: carol.swinyar@auc.edu. Website: <http://www.can-do-music.com>.

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