

# Keeping Your Sanity While Creating a Small School



## Music Curriculum

BY KATRINA KOCH

**B**ecause many Adventist schools are small, most Adventist elementary teachers have to play a variety of roles. If you have to teach music in a small school, there may be times when you fear for your sanity because of the high expectations of the job. You may feel unequal to the task if music was not emphasized in your teacher training.

To further complicate things, if you are teaching in a small school, you may be expected to adapt or create your own curriculum. The North American Division (NAD) Music Curriculum Guide offers excellent goals and guidance but only in outline form. There is a good reason for this; music teaching varies greatly from place to place and even within a school. This year, you may have five singers, one trumpeter, two drummers, and several students who don't even listen to the radio; next year, two singers, four students taking piano lessons, and one who plays the oboe!

Don't despair! There are resources and ideas available to help you to adapt or create a curriculum that works for your students. First, establish standards, then develop a curriculum with strong content and relevant lesson plans, utilizing the resources listed in this article.

### Standards

Whether you are beginning, building, or maintaining a music program, take some time to examine the music standards in your curriculum. The NAD curriculum guide for music<sup>1</sup> lists the concepts that should be covered in a music class. Your job as a music teacher is not to invent standards, but to prioritize and categorize them.

As you look at the standards, ask yourself: "How can I adapt

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these to fit my situation?" and "Which of these concepts are most vital for my students to understand?" You are thus assembling a scope-and-sequence plan for the age group you are teaching.

As you create your music curriculum, consider the expectations

of your administration and constituents. Engage in dialogue with the principal and/or head teacher to understand his or her perspective. If you're starting a brand-new program, do an informal survey of your school, church, and community to learn about their preferences and opinions. Elicit specific input, such as "We want our children to sing at each of the constituent churches once during the year" or "We want the children to lead song service at this church once a month."

Consider many factors while shaping your scope-and-sequence plans. First, research music programs at schools similar to yours. (How many students are involved in music? How often do music classes meet? Do the musical groups take tours? What performance outlets are available?) Second, learn about your community families by meeting parents, visiting churches, and asking a lot of questions and then just listening. You may encounter a lot of expectations that seem too high or unreasonable, but don't totally disregard those opinions—tuck them away. High expectations can be met in time, as the program grows. Third, be open to directions God would have you

and the music program take. As He said, “my thoughts [are] higher than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9, NLT).<sup>2</sup>

## Curriculum

### Content

Even when the standards are in place, many teachers struggle with content: Exactly how do you teach quarter notes or treble clefs in a music class? There may be a plethora of songs “out there,” but how do you find them? The NAD K-8 Curriculum Guide is a good source of elementary-level songs and other church-approved musical content. As you begin to supplement the guide, look for songs that fit the standards. Refer to the list of resources at the end of this article, and use your own creativity. Ask other music teachers for advice. Search the Web and online databases for song collections and curriculum resources. Ask friends and relatives about memorable songs they learned as children. Don’t ever stop once you start looking for songs!

In most music programs, other materials take the place of traditional “textbooks” (for example, hymnbooks or octavo scores for a choir, or large cue cards and rhythm instruments for elementary music). When choosing materials to supplement your curriculum, look for those that will directly meet and assess the standards you have set. Consult with other teachers, and use the online reference list at the close of this article.

### Lesson Planning

Along with designing content, many teachers struggle with structuring time in a music class, which often requires different long-term planning than other subjects. Before the school year starts, compile your main objectives for each music class. A choir objective might be: *Students will sight-read a melody with 80 percent accuracy by April.* A less specific goal might be: *Students will be able to describe the emotional and spiritual message in each piece we perform.*

With the objectives in front of you, draft a yearly outline for each class you teach, broken down by the week or the day (I recommend using a form resembling the one in Table 1). Set a performance goal for each week/day; this goal should be a behavior or action your students are to exhibit during that class period. For example, a performance goal for the first week of a 1st-grade classroom music might be: *All students will clap a steady beat.* For the third month of 5th grade, it might be: *Students will improvise a melody using pentatonic keys on the piano.*<sup>3</sup>

Creating lesson plans for music classes and ensembles requires a slightly different approach than for other subjects. In ensemble classes, such as choir or band, plan specific openers and closers; most ensembles will need tuning or warm-ups at the beginning of each class period. Classroom music will capture student interest if you begin with an interesting attention-getter as part of an established routine. Knowing

the routine makes students feel safe and prepared to participate and learn.

Beginning music teachers often struggle with structuring the main part of class time. A good rule of thumb is to plan a couple of 10- or 15-minute activities, and keep a clock visible at all times so you can monitor progress.

Here are some other helpful tips as you create music lesson plans:

- Practice all music you will teach ahead of time. If you don’t know it well, you will be more concerned with getting the song right than helping the students learn musical concepts within the song.
- Resist the urge to just teach *about* music. While there are many interesting social and historical ideas that provide the context for songs, those ideas are not the main content of a music class. Spend time learning about the pitches, the rhythms, and the expressive qualities of the music before focusing on extra-musical details.
- Resist the urge to just do the music without teaching it. Many music teachers have reverted to “Let’s sing it again” because they do not feel they have any musical advice to offer. Learn all you can about the music, and then *teach the music.*<sup>4</sup>
- Always set concrete, measurable goals for each lesson. If a goal is not measurable, you won’t know if you’ve reached it. Developing relevant, workable lesson plans takes time, but once achieved, it gives the music teacher a tool to actually

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Table 1

Music	Class	1-2	Week	13	Notes
Ray Learning Topics					Materials
Readiness: Note using 8 1/2 in					Conversational College Student book
Behavioral Objectives			Students will:		cards
Repeat a rhythm by role on neutral and rhythm syllables					ABC Book 2
Play a 8 1/2 in pattern on an instrument					ABC Book 2
Listen and discern one pattern from others					hand drum
Speak an artistic white object story					hand drum
Jan 20			Tue/Wed		object sticks
Greeting				Jan 4	Thur
Echo game (Echo me on “da”) Use rhythms on p. 8 of CB					Greeting
Warm-up					Echo game (Echo me on tas and ticks) Use rhythms on p. 8
Sing: MBYD p. 30					Warm-up
T. Plays the Bingo rhythm on hand drum					People on the Bus, ABC p. 24
S. Speaks the Bingo rhythm using neutral syllables (da)					T. Draw a bus. Ask which parts of the bus make sound.
Feature Focus(es)					S. Offer responses. T. Write down parts on cards
Find music in the future (present)					Feature Focus(es)
Circle: The Carpenter, p. 22					Circle: People on the Bus
T. Speak words of the song in rhythm (use sticks for interest)					T. Sing the song to class by role (people and wheels)
S. Echo words of the song by role					S. Echo words and tune of song by role
T. Give sticks to 4 helpers.					T. Choose volunteers to pick parts of the bus out of hat
Insist to play only on the “he goes ra” part in the style					S. Choose part of the bus and play it to on an instrument during the sound
S. Play on “he goes ra” along with the beat in the right style					T. Choose four people to estimate ga Ta ra Ta the bus the bus!
Repeat with 2nd and 3rd verses					S. Sing a verse while the artists people go (_____)!
Cool-down					Cool-down
Know when NOT to speak			Speaking, use p. 6		Know when NOT to speak
Follow procedure on TM 19					Follow procedure on TM 19
Instrument, use p. 5					
Goodbye					Goodbye
Evaluation					Evaluation

shape the musical learning, rather than simply hoping something will rub off on students in the music-making process.

## Resources

As you examine standards and develop lesson plans, the lack of resources will probably be your biggest challenge. It is easy to feel as if there are no resources whatsoever, especially when working in small communities or beginning a program where there was none before. Consider the following often-untapped resources:

### People

Your first and best resource is your students. Find out what they know, conduct surveys about their interests, chat informally with them, and keep your eyes open for potential talents or interests. Remember the adage, “They don’t care what you know until they know you care.” When you let your students know you care by showing an interest in their lives, they will respond. Ask them to do things for you in or out of the classroom, for programs, or for special holidays at school. Let some students plan a church service or a school recital. You may discover a great reader/grader, a good section leader, a spiritual leader who enjoys leading out in prayer, or a storyteller. Needing help is not a weakness; it shows you’re human, and it gives the students an opportunity to shine.

A second great resource is fellow teachers. Get in touch with the other teachers at your school and at other schools around the conference and the nation. Attend seminars, take classes, and exchange ideas. Don’t be bashful about asking if you can use other teachers’ ideas; most people are more than willing to share! While waiting to begin a summer class, set up an afternoon chat (online or in person) with a fellow teacher to exchange ideas. Stick to the subject—don’t complain about things you can’t change. While making friends with other inspired teachers, look for someone who could be a good mentor. A mentor is someone who has been there and lived to tell about it . . . because of love for the job and for the students. Sometimes they’re the only people who really understand your challenges and frustrations. If you’re coming up dry looking for mentors in your own area (and it can get lonely in the single-teacher school), e-mail or call a college professor, a music professor or teacher educator at a local Adventist college, or search online for experts in a nearby city.

A third, and very important, resource is parents and community members. Build relationships by meeting people at church or school open houses. If they don’t invite you over for lunch, invite them! Send out invitations to school activities. Find out who leads out in Pathfinders and other youth groups. Many parents will be glad to help in the classroom or on tours or field trips if they are asked. Be specific about what you need.<sup>5</sup>

### Equipment

Music teachers often feel most deeply their lack of resources in the area of equipment. But instead of bemoaning your plight, make a plan, communicate, and begin to act.

First, draw up a quick inventory of what you do have. Make lists of things you need, based on your expectations and objec-

tives for the class. Prioritize the list, and start asking for things. Ask your administration, check out yard sales, put notices in church bulletins, and call other schools to borrow music, instruments, or other equipment. Talk to parents (you’ve already developed relationships with them at this point) and anyone else who is interested. Hold fundraisers so you can purchase your own equipment. This is a great way to involve your student body and parents. However, since fundraising requires a lot of momentum and dedication, you will need to plan carefully. Get people excited about the potential for new equipment, and let them take on the task of raising money.

## Conclusion

Whether you are starting a program from scratch, taking over an established program, or seeking to enhance the program you currently lead, take the time to establish your standards, plan lessons, and understand your resources.

Finally, decide how much time and energy you will devote to this music program. Establish boundaries around your family life, rest time, etc. If you are a single teacher with few personal expenses or outside interests, you may be able to devote quite a lot of time to lesson plans, programs, and creativity. If you have a lot of other obligations, you may not be able to do as much. Set limits, being flexible and thinking creatively about how to allot your time and energy. In addition, talk to the people with influence over the music program. Keep lines of communication open so that you will have support when you need it.

Above all, enjoy the opportunity God has given you to teach young people about music and to mentor them. Remember that God is with you and will give you guidance. ☺



**Katrina Koch** is currently pursuing a Master of Music degree in choral conducting at the University of Oregon in Eugene. Before attending graduate school, she was music department chair at Livingstone Adventist Academy in Salem, Oregon, teaching K-5 classroom music, junior high and high school choirs, voice lessons, and some English classes.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Fine Arts Curriculum Guide K-8: <http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=131>; Music & Visual Arts Curriculum Guide 9-12: <http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=6764>. Both accessed October 15, 2007.

2. Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

3. It is important to remember that the yearly outline is not set in stone—you can change it later if needed. The benefits of having a plan include confidence, motivation, and authority in the classroom. Your students will feel more at ease when you know where the class is headed.

4. See the MENC Standards for more ideas on teaching the *music*. Also, the Music Curriculum guide for the South Pacific Division has an excellent unit-planning guide at <http://www.aiias.edu/ict/Supplements/MUSIC.htm>.

5. See the article “Comprehensive Considerations” for more on scheduling, public relations, budget concerns, administrative relationships, and burnout: [http://content.epnet.com/pdf14\\_16/pdf/2004/TCA/01Dec04/15595331.pdf?T=P&P=AN&K=15595331&EbscoContent=dGJyMNHr7ESeqa440dvuOLCm rk+ep7VSR6i4TK6WxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGuslGwrBVNuePfg yex+Eu3q64A&D=aph](http://content.epnet.com/pdf14_16/pdf/2004/TCA/01Dec04/15595331.pdf?T=P&P=AN&K=15595331&EbscoContent=dGJyMNHr7ESeqa440dvuOLCm rk+ep7VSR6i4TK6WxWXS&ContentCustomer=dGJyMPGuslGwrBVNuePfg yex+Eu3q64A&D=aph).

# ONLINE RESOURCES

## Seventh-day Adventist Curriculum Guides

### Fine Arts Curriculum Guide K-8

<http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=131>

### Music & Visual Arts Curriculum Guide 9-12

<http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=6764>

## MENC National Standards

Basic statements: <http://www.menc.org/publication/books/standards.htm>

Detailed, by grade: <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/teach/standards/standards.cfm>

## Lesson Plan Ideas and Resources

<http://www.can-do-music.com> K-8

A great site for elementary music methods, especially for teachers finding themselves teaching music who were not music majors. It is managed by Carol Swinyar, who led seminars at the 2006 North American Division Teachers Convention in Nashville, and whose article appears in this issue.

<http://www.lessonplanspage.com/Music.htm> K-12

Choose your grade level. This site is good for supplementing your curriculum.

<http://www.artsalive.ca/en/mus/index.asp> K-6

Great instrument lab and activities and games—give the students some guidance and then let them browse the Website.

<http://www.creatingmusic.com/new/sketch/> K-6

Great for young composers—very accessible!

<http://www.sfskids.org/templates/home.asp?pageid=1> K-8

The Music Lab is good, as is Composerize—a good site for youngsters to browse.

<http://fcweb.fcasd.edu/~traugh/begin.html> 4-12

Techniques and tips for beginning instrumentalists.

<http://yoda.isd77.k12.mn.us/music/k-12music/> K-12

A list of other Websites—a lot of lists that refer you to more lists. Keep going until you find useful resources.

<http://www.lawrencehallofscience.org/shockwave/jar.html> K-8

This is fun if you have sound on your computer. But you can make a low-tech version with actual containers and water, and write patterns for songs you find.

<http://www.homeschool.com/resources01/artmusic.asp> K-8

Rod and Staff books

<http://www.theorytime.com> K-12

Music theory workbooks are comprehensive, but not free. Good for independent work.

[http://www.mustcreate.org/teacher/teach3\\_0.shtml](http://www.mustcreate.org/teacher/teach3_0.shtml)

Click on lesson plans and choose a curriculum Website—I recommend the following sites:

1. Americans for the Arts: YouthArts, Program Planning—use for guidance as you structure your art program. While specifically designed for high-risk communities, it is broad enough to be adapted to almost any art program. K-12

2. Berkleeshares.com:  
This site is good for private lessons in various areas; it could be useful reading material for individual students.

3. Crayola—good lessons for young children—search for music K-2  
The “Let’s Make Music Practice Chart” would be good for private lessons. Musical Chairs would work well in a music classroom.

4. Dallas Symphony Orchestra 3-6

Search by grade level.

My recommendations:

- Brass Instruments Uncoiled
- Forecast: Music—various lessons relating to weather

c. Sounds of Music: Acoustic Experiments

d. The Story of the Orchestra

5. Federal Resources for Educational Excellence 7-12

Contains some good information for research projects, particularly for advanced junior high or high school level.

6. Gateway to Educational Materials K-8

Search for art lessons, the keyword music, and you will find several sites with potential, but few actual lessons. The following plans seem interesting: “Who Stole the Cookie” and “Phone Number Melodies”—I’d substitute a whisper for zero instead of the B below middle C

7. MENC’s 300 years of people and pianos 7-12

This is a good site for high school music, if you get the video to go with the plans. It includes lessons and some listening links (under “Fun and Games”)

8. Mondavi Center 7-12

Click on the curriculum guide for your area (vocal music, instrumental, etc.) and print and use specific pages as infosheets for your ensemble.

9. New York Times Learning Network 7-12

These lesson plans are best suited for English or social studies class—they don’t directly deal with music, but if you are teaching ABOUT musicians, there are a few helpful lessons here.

10. Rhythm Structure as Easy as . . . K-8

Click on PDF packet for a novel way to teach rhythm. They promote boom-whackers, but you can use any percussion instrument.

11. Teachers.net K-12

The music section of this site is great! A lesson plan exchange offers many great ways to teach rhythm, harmony, melody, and historical concepts. You can submit your own lesson plans here, too.

## Sight reading

Gia Music K-12

<http://www.giamusic.com/>

Music Education

Search: Solfege

Conversational Solfege—it costs \$45 for the teacher’s edition at each level, plus a charge for the student book and CD, but the technique is sound and the investment is worth it. Call the company to ask if you can try it out for a few weeks and send it back if you change your mind.

## Jenson Sight-Singing Course 7-12

Available on <http://www.sheetmusicplus.com> or <http://www.amazon.com>

This is a great resource for teaching choirs to sight-read. It is available in multiple levels.

## Miscellaneous

<http://www.stephencovey.com/>

