



Shaping theFuture

August 2026 ■ 26–8, No. 2

Lutheran Education Association ■ lea.org

Singing in the Classroom: *Don't Leave It to the Professionals*

PART 2: Practical Information for Singing in Classrooms

By Dr. Samuel Eatherton

In Part 1 of this article, I made a case for everyone—teachers and students alike, regardless of their formal music training—to sing in Lutheran schools. I would now like to offer more specific and practical information for teachers by addressing the following questions:

1. What is beautiful singing, and what are some ways to teach children to sing beautifully?
2. How can a teacher use hymns and liturgy to teach the elements of music?
3. How can the entire school—including teachers with limited formal music training—support and promote singing?

What is beautiful singing, and what are some ways to teach children to sing beautifully?

Thus far, I have been encouraging teachers to sing with their children regardless of how wonderful (or not) they believe their own voices are. I want to stress this point again: singing with children can and should be done in Lutheran schools without undue concern for what is considered “correct.” Most often, singing comes naturally and should be encouraged.



Singing with children can and should be done in Lutheran schools without undue concern for what is considered “correct.” Most often, singing comes naturally and should be encouraged.

With that said, there are healthy ways to sing and techniques to make the voice sound more beautiful, and these go hand in hand. As with any subject, such as math or English, we strive to refine and improve, growing in our abilities. The same is true of singing. Understanding the child's voice is the first step in helping him or her care for it and sing beautifully to the glory of God.

When a person sings, the sound should not be forced. If a child has furrowed brows or a strained neck, it indicates an unhealthy way of singing. Often, this occurs because the child has been told to sing louder and is trying to force out more sound. This often results in “yell-singing,” which is not a beautiful sound. Allow me to explain what is happening.

Every person has both a “chest voice” and a “head voice.” Simply put, the chest voice is used for speaking and singing lower notes. To experience this, one can speak or sing low notes while placing a hand on the upper chest to feel the vibrations—hence the term “chest voice.” As one sings higher notes, the vibrations shift from the chest to the sinus cavities in the forehead. The singer relaxes the jaw on the higher notes and the vibrations can be felt above and behind the eyes, which is why this is called the “head voice.”

It is often easier for a child to sing louder on lower chest-voice notes. When a teacher says, “Sing louder, sing louder!” children will often force their voices to sing using a chest voice, even on higher notes that should be sung in a head voice. Those higher notes will not come out in a chest voice unless the singer forces them with volume, resulting in a “shouty” sound. This way of singing is neither pleasing to the ear nor healthy for the child's voice.

Children can experience their head voice even during infancy and preschool years.



©Stock/Highway Starz Photos

An unhealthy way of singing ... occurs because the child has been told to sing louder and is trying to force out more sound. This often results in “yell-singing,” which is not a beautiful sound.

Children can experience their head voice even during infancy and preschool years. (The cooings of babies are always produced in the head voice.) Singing on the vowel “oo” (lightly and at a higher pitch than one normally speaks) is the best way

©Stock/Maria Voronich



©Stock/Highway Starz Photos



©iStock/SeventyFour

From about age six and up, children can imitate the sound of a police siren on the syllable “oooooo.”

sings (usually a church nave) should have hard surfaces and resonant acoustics, allowing the children’s voices to be more easily heard.

Two resources from Concordia Publishing House, *My First Hymnal* and *One and All Rejoice*, are worth noting. Recordings of the songs in these hymnals are available on Spotify and YouTube. Teachers may use these recordings to teach their classes, especially if they are not confident enough to sing and teach new music themselves.

2. How can a teacher use hymns and liturgy to teach the elements of music?

This question could warrant an entire article of its own, but for our purposes, I will begin by noting that hymns are designed to be sung by large groups of people. Because of this, they have characteristics that make them easy to sing.

for children to experience this feeling. From about age six and up, children can imitate the sound of a police siren on the syllable “oooooo,” using their arm and hand to show the sound fluctuating up and down. Singing hymns that remain on higher notes can be helpful as well. Examples include “I Am Jesus Little Lamb,” “From Heaven Above to Earth I Come,” and “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

The encouragement a teacher should give is never merely to sing louder; rather, it should be to sing beautifully and lightly. Children should be encouraged to listen to those around them while singing, as this will make them more conscientious singers and enable them to blend their voices with others. Children can sing loudly in their head voice—simply give them a descant that soars above the melody, and they will demonstrate their skill in this regard. However, adults must also understand that children’s voices are smaller than ours and cannot produce the same volume as a fully developed adult voice. This is one reason why the place where a children’s choir regularly



©iStock/Highway Starz Photos

Have children sing familiar hymn tunes by pointing to the notes in the hymnal and singing the rhythms. This is the beginning of music reading.

For example, they usually have simple rhythms such as half notes, quarter notes, and eighth notes. These are the building blocks of music and should be taught and experienced as early as kindergarten and first grade. If you use a counting system like the Kodály method, in which “tah” is a quarter note, “ti-ti” is two eighth notes, and “tah-ah” is a half note, you can have children sing familiar hymn tunes by pointing to the notes in the hymnal and singing the rhythms. This is the beginning of music reading. As children grow older, they can learn other rhythms common in hymnody, such as dotted quarter notes and syncopations.

Teachers with some musical training will note that teaching children to sing using solfege (do-re-mi, etc.) can easily translate into reading the pitches of notes in hymns. Common key signatures in the hymnal are G, F, C, and D. These keys provide children with practice reading notes where “Do” starts on a space and “Do” starts on a line on the musical staff. Using the hand signs for solfege incorporates the kinesthetic movement so important for inculcating the correct intervals one is singing. Additional information on these methods can be found in the books *The Kodály Method* by Lois Choksy or *First Steps in Music* and *Conversational Solfege*, both by Dr. John Feierabend.

3. How can the entire school—including teachers with limited formal music training—support and promote singing?

Having a pastor and a principal who appreciate the powerful impact of singing is essential in developing a culture of singing within the school. They will be the ones to encourage teachers and aides to sing with the children throughout the day.

- Preschool teachers are masters of this: clean-up songs, snack-time songs, Jesus songs—they understand that children are natural singers and tend to focus more on tasks if they are singing songs at the same time.
- Elementary-age students may not sing clean-up songs (or perhaps they might), but they can sing during morning devotion time.

Preschool teachers are masters of this: clean-up songs, snack-time songs, Jesus songs—they understand that children are natural singers and tend to focus more on tasks if they are singing songs at the same time.



©Stock/Fathhoca

- Have *Lutheran Service Book* hymnals available in each classroom. (One school in which I taught gave each child a hymnal in first grade. These were their very own hymnals to use through eighth grade and beyond.)
- Sing your mealtime prayer before lunch.
- Sing fun and silly songs (not everything sung needs to come from the hymnal).
- Sing at the end of the day during closing devotion or prayer.

If your children attend a special music class, they will hopefully receive additional singing instruction; if not, you, as their classroom teacher, may be their only music teacher. Singing is both the simplest and the best way for children to learn music.

The schools where I taught implemented a hymn-of-the-month schedule. Each month, students in all grades learned the assigned hymn in their classrooms and music classes. Sometimes the classes memorized the hymn; other times, the younger grades learned only selected stanzas. We all sang the hymn in chapel services throughout the month. One of my schools had both a hymn-of-the-month and a hymn-of-the-week. The hymn of the week was sung in each classroom during the week—usually during opening devotions—as well as in music class and chapel. These children were provided with a wealth of hymnody throughout their days and weeks. I cannot think of a better way to fill the minds of our children than with the hymns they will sing for the rest of their lives.

If your school prioritizes having a specialized music teacher, it will go a long way toward helping children develop their singing and other musical skills. However, remember not to leave all the

Remember not to leave all the singing to the music teacher alone; every teacher can and should sing with their class.

You, as their classroom teacher, may be their only music teacher. Singing is both the simplest and the best way for children to learn music.



singing to the music teacher alone; every teacher can and should sing with their class. Special musicals, Christmas services, and choral concerts always require extra time—teachers can support their students by being flexible with schedules to allow time for students to rehearse towards excellence. Teachers can also review the lyrics of songs that children will be singing in church or for special programs. Having a church musician who also teaches singing in the school is a great benefit; it helps to bring cohesion between the music of the church and the school, as students sing for Sunday worship and learn the hymns of the congregation.

The era in which all Lutheran teacher candidates are required to know how to play the piano or organ is past. Even without special skills in playing a keyboard instrument, teachers can use their voices to bring music into their classrooms and instill the gift of song in their students for a lifetime of singing. Music that sings the truths of God's Word is a great gift from God and a valuable blessing to His church. Classroom and music teachers have the opportunity to impact countless students through this gift. May the Lord grant you wisdom and courage as you sing with your students about what God has done for us in Christ.



Samuel Eatherton is Kantor and Assistant Professor of Music Arts at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. Prior to accepting the call to the Seminary in

2024, he served churches in Michigan, Texas, and Wisconsin as school teacher and church musician. Sam and his wife Lois have five children between the ages of 16 and 25.

Quoted Scripture: ESV® and NIV

Review, Reflect, Resolve

- How can teachers in your setting bring music into the classroom?
- Does your school have favorite hymns or songs that are familiar to students?
- Singing at devotion time, before lunch, or at the end of the day are ways to incorporate singing into the school day. How can your school implement these ideas?

Additional Resources:

Part of Dr. Eatherton's work at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis involves administering a grant called the Children in Worship Initiative. This grant offers workshops and consulting for churches and schools wanting to build or improve their children's singing experiences.

Additionally, Dr. Sam Eatherton (eathertons@csl.edu), Mrs. Lois Eatherton (eathertonl@csl.edu), and Dr. Emily Woock (emily.woock@cuchicago.edu) of Concordia University Chicago are available to answer questions and provide resources to support teachers of music, especially those who direct children's choirs in Lutheran Schools. They are happy to work with teachers and would be honored to speak with you.



ShapingtheFuture is published monthly by Lutheran Education Association and distributed to members of LEA. All material included in **ShapingtheFuture** is the property of Lutheran Education Association and may not be reproduced without permission.

Copyright © 2026 Lutheran Education Association, 7400 Augusta Street, River Forest, IL 60305-1499

Website: www.lea.org **Email:** lea@lea.org

Executive Director: Thomas Wrege, Ed.D.
Executive Director Emeritus: Jonathan C. Laabs, Ed.D.
Editor Emeritus: Ed Grube
Director of Educational Resources: Denise Rice
Director of Member Services: Julie Klopke
Technology Project Director: Paul Piel
Design: Kathryn Brewer

To submit copy, letters to the editor or media for review, contact Paul Piel at pfpiel@gmail.com.

We look forward to hearing from you! Send your thoughts, ideas, and suggestions for future STF topics to lea@lea.org. LEA does not endorse articles cited in **ShapingtheFuture**. We provide links to connect members with information they might find useful.