Old Wine in New (Technological!) Bottles

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(Technological!!)

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For many music teachers, a technological onslaught of terms like “USB”, “MIDI”, “sampling”, and “sequencing” can be a sensory overload. The overloaded teacher might avoid the use of any technology because it seems so daunting. If you find yourself in such an overload mode, consider this: you might be able to give your lessons a technological repackaging using technology similar to that which you already use every day.

Many campuses now have digital projectors that allow your overhead screen or white board to become essentially a large computer monitor that can be seen by an entire class. Whether installed in every classroom or available for short-term checkout to teachers at your site, this projection technology is a very simple way to enhance your lesson with interactive multi-media. Your computer becomes a presentation device that can display images, video, and coordinated audio. Presentation tools like Microsoft’s PowerPoint or Apple’s Keynote are very easy to learn, and are very similar in usage to your standard word processing software. These software bundles are already available in most school-supported software packages, and usually come preloaded with a wide array of starter designs and helpful templates.

Experience with today’s students tends to indicate that the use of computers and multi-media has a better chance of capturing their attention (at least initially) compared to traditional delivery. The use of this technology functions to facilitate the teacher’s instruction, just as older technology like overhead projectors and audio recordings have done. Consider the following three examples of lessons that have been modified to include the support of presentation technology:

Elementary General Music: Kindergarten or Primary Grades

The existing lesson calls for 15 visual cards to be held up at various points in a simple song. The teacher must lead the class in singing and select the visual to be held up for the class to respond with movement.

With presentation technology: The 15 visual cards become slides in the presentation, and the students can use a larger space as they move with the music while still being able to see the large projection. The teacher can control what card is displayed at any time during the singing, and the slides can include colorful and fun graphics to capture the students’ attention. Additionally, by using an inexpensive and easily available wireless presentation control device, the teacher can move around the room and still control the images on the screen.

Elementary General Music: Intermediate Grades

The existing lesson involves teaching the students to read a series of rhythms in a long rondo form with recorded accompaniment. The students are to learn each rhythm, with the entire class performing the A section and small groups performing each of the other sections. The rhythms and a text are written out onto several pages, which could be used as overheads.

With presentation technology: Rather than fumbling with switching overhead pages, the notations are scanned or input into slides in a digital presentation. The teacher can easily duplicate the A slide of the rondo form within the presentation as desired, and arrange the entire rondo form in order to allow for rehearsal and performance with the accompaniment. Using a slightly more advanced feature, the teacher can actually add the audio accompaniment to the presentation with the slides pre-timed to change at the correct phrases in the music.

Middle/High School Ensemble

A listening lesson uses a recorded example of a professional or student performance. Students are to follow along and note comments about specific passages, perhaps reading in their own parts as they follow.

With presentation technology: The presentation can be controlled by the teacher to display visual or textual cues at particular points of the recording to direct students’ attention. The presentation could include excerpts from the full score or any part, with or without individual lines highlighted electronically. Features like photos, colors, or animated text can further ensure that the students’ attention is where it should be as they listen.

Each of these examples represents a minimal investment in preparation that can yield years of great returns in student involvement as well as classroom management during the lesson. There are many other ways in which presentation technology can enhance a wide variety of lessons through use of notation, graphics, and multi-media. Any music teacher in any specialty could benefit from examining your tried and true lessons, and then taking a little time to repackaging the old wine into new – and technologically enhanced – bottles.

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