Encountering Technology in the Music Classroom

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Thinking about technology provides us with an interesting opportunity to reflect on what is new and old around us. The instruments that we use every day, from pianos to general music instruments, to those in bands and orchestras, are in fact the result of advances in technology that allowed mass production to put a musical instrument in the hands of so many students. Further advances in technology have brought us digital recordings, electronic tuners, synthesized instruments, and computers capable of sharing resources over the Internet. Particularly in the last twenty years, innovations including innovations in music technology have been presented to teachers at an intense pace. Teachers can easily become lost in the flood of new “gadgets” and fall behind the learning curve, leading to apprehension about trying something new.

The initial encounter with a new technology is usually the most dreaded—the point when you are saying to yourself, “This looks interesting, but is the amount of time I will spend learning to use this technology worth the benefit my students and I will get from it?” Whether you are the most well-informed tech user or you can barely program your old VCR, there is technology out there in the form of equipment or software that can benefit you and your students. The trick is to find the right tools that will maximize your benefits while also appropriately matching your ability and resource level.

Here are some tips for setting up successful encounters with technology:

1. Start small (small projects, small budgets)
   Have you ever heard about a great technology application like a computer lab with electronic keyboards that cost many thousands of dollars and take up a whole room at a particular school? These big ideas can be very successful, but they take careful planning. Many people are discouraged from thinking about technology on such a large scale when starting from meager resources. A better approach might be to take smaller bites—start with one new product, and use it to improve one process in your current classroom without completely starting from scratch. Many products and vendors will offer a free trial to allow you to take a test drive before committing financial resources for which you are uncertain. When you are ready, you can start building up your technology inventory of equipment and software at a pace that fits your resources.

2. Ask other teachers how they use technology
   A good barometer of the effectiveness of a new piece of technology is the opinion of other teachers. Teachers who have actually used equipment or software in their classrooms can give you an insider’s perspective that is hard to find anywhere else. Reviews from salespersons or the Internet can be helpful, but there is no substitute for talking to someone with practical experience using a product. Some things to ask other teachers might be: Where did you first find out about this technology? How much did it cost? How long did it take you to learn to use it? How do you use it in your classroom? How have your students reacted to this technology? Has it been an effective teaching tool? Was it worth the time and effort?

3. Plan time for your own learning curve
   Even if you seek advice from other teachers, your own technology background will be different from theirs. Plan time to allow yourself to become familiar with a new piece of equipment or software before you need to use it with students. Ask around to see if other teachers or product vendors would be willing to spend a short time with you to help you get started. Be patient with yourself.

4. Ask for help (even from the students)
   Just as in any learning situation, you will inevitably need assistance at some point. Don’t be afraid to ask for help from anyone who might have some expertise—and this can often include your students! The MySpace generation has grown up with computers, and many of your students may have technology skills in certain areas. In particular, students can be great help about using email, searching the Internet, and using computer applications for word processing and other basic tasks. Students who are familiar with technology also tend to adapt to new products very quickly. You can draw upon these students as a resource for your own learning and in your classroom community.

5. Remember that technology is always changing and evolving
   New products and services are constantly being introduced into the education marketplace, and no one

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can stay on top of every one of them. Products can also change as newer versions become available, which often demand some time for learning the new features. However, if you set a goal to learn about even just one new technology product each school year, you'll soon have many great additions to your trove of teaching resources. You'll also find that much of the "tech-know-how" crosses over from one product to the next, making each new technology learning experience easier than the last one.

Technology can help you make your teaching more effective. It can help you stay organized, manage your time, and reach your students in new ways. Like any tool, a technology product requires some investment of your time and resources. But by using the right tool for the right job, you can reap the rewards in both your own satisfaction and your student's success.

Our AMEA 2008 In-Service Conference will include ten sessions on music technology. There will be a wide range of offerings, covering the latest products from major music technology vendors as well as applications of technology in the classroom by music teachers from our state. You will be able to find out about general types of technology products as well as more in-depth looks at specific products. We hope to see you there!

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Come join us for a celebration!

We will be rededicating the Albert O. Davis Fine Arts Building on October 7th at 3:00 pm.

The concert will feature a performance by the Central Arizona Concert Band. Half of the concert will feature compositions by Al Davis. While a $10 donation is suggested (under 18 is $3), admission is free to Arizona Educators and former students of Mr. Davis.

Albert Davis was an Arizona music teacher for over 40 years. He was one of the founders of ABODA. Al did arrangements for numerous musical groups including Arizona State and Ohio State marching bands. He composed the ASU Fight Song as well. Mr. Davis was an internationally known composer with over 600 published compositions. You have probably even played some of his numbers! In 1995 Albert Oliver Davis helped form the Franklin Phonetic Primary School. This free public Charter School has an emphasis on the fine arts and has received many academic awards. The school is located at 6116 Highway 69 Prescott Valley, Arizona 86314. For more