

In my humble opinion...

Could the Children in the Younger Grades Benefit from Technology in the Music Classroom?

by Amy M. Burns, Far Hills Country Day School,
TI:ME Teacher of the Year 2005



As I began teaching Pre-Kindergarten through Third Grade general music at Far Hills Country Day School (FHCDS), in Far Hills, NJ, I was only slightly aware of music technology. I had just earned my Bachelor in Music Education and Performance from Ithaca College in 1995, and, at that time, music technology courses were not required for this degree. During my fourth month at FHCDS, my colleague was granted the funding to have SoundTree

(<http://www.soundtree.com>), a leading company in music technology services for education, install a 16-station Korg X5 Keyboard Lab with the teacher's station having MIDI capabilities to the Apple computer current of that time period. Sometime after this installation, an iMac computer appeared in my classroom. As I looked at the lab, looked at this new iMac and began studying current music software, I wondered what this would mean to the music curriculum. Could music technology enhance The National Association for Music Education Nine Standards (<http://www.menc.org>)? Would I be able to use the software and hardware required to apply music technology in the classroom? Most importantly, could the children in the younger grades benefit from technology in the music classroom?

The answer to all of these questions is an emphatic 'yes!' In the past eight years, my elementary music classroom has been enhanced by the addition of music technology. Dr. Thomas Rudolph, director of music at the Haverford Township School District in Pennsylvania, a leading music technology expert and a published author of many books including *Teaching Music with Technology, second edition* (GIA Publications), tells music teachers the following anecdote: "If you do not know how to burn a CD, ask your 6th grader to do it. If you want to learn how to burn a CD and need someone to explain it to you slowly, ask your 3rd grader." This thought always makes me laugh, however, it is a reality. Elementary students are growing up in households with at least one computer. My Kindergartners even talk to me about the iPod that their older sibling just received and how many songs that iPod can hold. Technology is here to stay and if used as an enhancement or reinforcement tool, it is a benefit to the elementary music classroom.

In the late 1990's, I began to build my experience with music technology. My minimum goal was to learn what my students knew about the computer. In order to do this, I also had to be a learner. At this time, the Technology Institute for Music Educators (TI:ME) (<http://www.ti-me.org>), was offering courses in utilizing music technology in the classroom. These classes are geared for the music educator with novice to advanced experience in the use of technology. I began taking these courses and the more I learned about the uses of music technology in the classroom, the more I mastered them. The ultimate reward was watching the students become excited and successful to music with another tool, in addition to performing with their voices, with instruments or movement. As Dr. Rudolph states in his book, *Teaching Music with Technology, second edition* (GIA Publications), technology can be used as a creative, performance and learning tool for students (2004, p. 7).

At FHCDS, music technology is apparent throughout the elementary grade levels. In the Kindergarten classroom, students learn to write their names. In the music classroom, the kindergartners are learning to compose their names. By using the one iMac computer in the music classroom connected to a big screen TV, the students compose their names using Morton Subotnick's website, <http://www.creatingmusic.com>. Creatingmusic.com is a wonderful website for young children to compose music and experience musical genres and performances. The Kindergartners love to hear their names set to music. However, the students also identify





and describe the melodic direction of their names (see Fig. 1). In addition, the website lets the students turn their names upside-down or backwards (see Fig. 2). This, in turns, lets the students describe the difference in melodic direction. Finally, three tempo markings are available with which the students can use to



perform their name. A turtle for adagio, a bunny walking for allegro and a bunny running for presto, are the symbols for these tempos.

During the winter trimester, first graders learn about the instruments of the orchestra through Sergei Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. They study the story by listening to the story, identifying the main characters and the instruments that represent the main characters, drawing pictures to the story and acting out the story. When the unit is finished, I bring the first graders to the computer lab where they learn more about the orchestral instruments through the San Francisco Symphony's website, <http://www.sfskids.org>. This website has a variety of age-appropriate musical activities that can be used to enhance or reinforce any musical skills that are being taught in the classroom. For this unit, students participate in a scavenger hunt to find each instrument of the orchestra. As they find, listen and explore each instrument, they check it off their scavenger hunt recording sheet. At the end of the scavenger hunt, the first graders answer the following question, "Which instrument is your favorite?" The answers wonderfully vary from, "I liked the flute because my older sister plays it," or "I like them all. All of them rock!" In addition, I received a response to this activity from a parent of a first grader. The parent saw the scavenger hunt and decided to explore the website further with her first grader. She then told me about "The composerizer," where the student can compose music, and "The Music Lab," where the drummer begins to perspire the more the tempo increases.

Music software continues to enhance the elementary music classroom in the second and third grades too. In the spring trimester of the second grade, the students begin to compose a four-measure B Section to a song with the form ABA. Throughout the year, the students have been studying rhythm patterns in common time meter. In addition, to integrate the second grade China unit into the music classroom, the students study the pentatonic scale by identifying the notes through solfege symbols, singing songs, and performing on Orff instruments. As the school year closes, the students use the notes in the C Pentatonic Scale and an Orff instrument to compose a B Section to a song using rhythm patterns with whole, half and quarter notes in them. When their song is complete, the students are given two drum loops and two guitar loops from Apple's software, *GarageBand* (<http://www.apple.com/ilife/>), which they can add to their composition. When this is complete, I export the *GarageBand* file to Apple's *iTunes* and burn their compositions onto CD. This CD holds all of the second graders' compositions and it is for the students to keep. One of the most wonderful outcomes from this unit was when the parent of a second grader came to visit me the day after her child brought the CD home. The parent wanted to let me know how proud she was of her child's song.

When it comes to the MENC National Standards, the third graders accomplish standard number one - singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music - and standard number three - improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments - by using the keyboard lab and Apple's *GarageBand*. The third graders begin performing on the recorder at the start of the school year. They play numerous songs with the notes B A and G above Middle C. When they are in the keyboard lab, they perform many of their recorder songs on the keyboard. This helps reinforce reading and performing the notes on the music staff. At the end of the school year, the students are given a twelve-measure accompaniment track created in *GarageBand*. The students use the keyboards to improvise a new eight-measure melody using the notes B A and G (the first two and last two measures are for the introduction and coda). When they are satisfied with their melody, they create words to

the melody. The students then record themselves singing the melody with the accompaniment track. This can easily be done with the internal microphone found on the computer. If the students do not feel comfortable recording themselves singing, they can ask friends to sing along with them.

As seen in all of these lessons, technology takes the creative role in enhancing a musical skill or unit. It is never the motivation of the lesson or unit. The goal of this article was to assist you in taking the first step with incorporating technology to enhance a musical unit or skill. If you would like to see some of these lessons with the objectives, procedures, outcome and assessment rubric, please log onto SoundTree.com and click on "Teaching Resources," then "Lessons and Projects."

Resources:

National standards for arts education. (1994). Reston, VA: MENC Music Educators National Conference.

Rudolph, T. (2004). *Teaching music with technology* (2nd ed). Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc.

Amy Burns is the 2005 TI:ME Teacher of the Year. She is a graduate of Ithaca College and will complete her master's work at Central Connecticut State University in September of 2005. Her teaching career has been in New Jersey and at the Far Hills Country Day School since 1997. She teaches general music to Pre-Kindergarten to Grade Five. She is the founder and director of the school orchestra, the FHCDS Philharmonic and the Far Hills Conservatory, where she supervises private lessons. In addition to being certified Level 1 & 2 by TI:ME she is also recognized with an Orff-Schulwerk Level 1. A frequent contributor to The TI:MEs, the newsletter of the Technology Institute for Music Educators, Amy has been active in the SummerTI:ME classroom working with TI:ME classes at Temple University. She has presented at the NJAIS, MENC, PMEA, NJMEA, TMEA and MMEA Conferences.

What's Your Opinion

Reactions to this article are most welcome. TI:ME members can sign into the members-only section and join the [discussion group](#).

[In my humble opinion...](#)



Home