

TI:ME ARTICLE

Technology Help for the Teachers Who Teach the Teachers?

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TI:ME was conceived by those of us involved in the initial Valley Forge planning in 1995 as an umbrella organization for providing music technology training and a national system of certification. The primary focus of service was the K-12 classroom music teacher. Reflecting back, members at the college-level more often participate and support TI:ME in roles as workshop sponsors and instructors. Of the TI:ME instructors currently listed on the website, some 65 percent are affiliated with colleges and universities.

What about training for the teachers who teach the teachers? I am thinking here not only of college music education faculty, but their colleagues in theory, musicology, studio performance, music therapy, and the like. An essay written many years ago by B.F. Skinner entitled “Why Teachers Fail” (Skinner, 1968) comes to mind. Skinner concerned himself with many issues pedagogical and philosophical beyond getting his pigeons to press bars. In this essay Skinner laments that “college teaching, indeed, has not been taught at all.” He continues by noting that “the beginning [college] teacher receives no professional preparation. He [sic] usually begins to teach simply as he himself has been taught, and if he improves, it is only in the light of his own unaided experience.”

Can the same be said 40 years later for training in technology skills for college music instructors? Do not Skinner’s words serve as a “motivator” for us to ensure that this important group in the learning chain of music education be given the same serious attention? Participation and interest in ATMI sessions at the annual College Music Society conferences seems to suggest that this teachers-who-train-the-music-teachers group is motivated to improve its awareness and skills in music technology. For the past eight years, Illinois State University and The College Music Society have hosted an intensive one-week music technology training institute in June tailored to meet the pedagogical needs of college music instructors, just the audience Skinner addresses. However, only a small percent of those receiving TI:ME certification are college teachers [waiting on data from the TI:ME office on this point]. An important question to raise is where do the vast majority of college music teachers get their technology training.

Here is a checklist of six issues that college music teachers or any music teacher for that matter can use in assessing where they stand with their personal music technology skills, and most importantly, how effective they are in integrating these skills into their college courses. If you are reading this as one of those college teachers who excels in technology, feel free to use the checklist when working with your colleagues. If you are a college teacher looking for something beyond Skinner’s “unaided experience” this checklist is for you.

1. Am I making full use of the technology skills of my students?

A frequent reaction I see to music technology among many colleagues is a mixture of fear and intimidation. I've always suspected that there is an inverse correlation between age and the dexterity with which one feels comfortable using and adapting to technology. This leaves our students always several steps ahead of us. If you have similar feelings I offer some hope. Let your students provide the technology expertise; you provide the aesthetic eye, ear, and hand. And for music education, your insights on pedagogy and classroom management. That's what you were trained for. Give them the technology and turn them loose—they know this "stuff" better than you ever will. You serve as the guide-on-the-side for that which you know best, music and pedagogy. If you are teaching a music styles class, consider challenging the students to find a computer and some software (perhaps one of them has a laptop with ACID, GarageBand, or Cubase) and have them create compositions in the style you are currently studying in class—what would Mozart have created with GarageBand and a Mac instead of the clavier, for example.

2. What is driving my interest, the technology or the curriculum?

Many of us like to experiment with new technology for technology's sake. That's a lot of fun and often leads to interesting creative applications. But, when it comes to its application in the classroom, we need to make sure pedagogy drives the technology. We don't want to turn a music theory course into a computer notation class devoted to Finale and Sibelius. We can, however, enhance the learning experience in music theory classes with the same technology. Prepare the theory exercises in electronic form using the notation format of choice, post them on the Web or in a Blackboard or WebCT course area, and have the students complete their work and return the electronic files for your critique. This requires learning only a small subset of notation software skills, enough to handle the assignments at hand. Technology in this example is working in support of pedagogy.

3. Where's my aim? Am I focusing on large- or small-scale music technology projects?

Someone once said "before you do anything, you must do something." How often have we seen someone stuck in a mental block keeping them from exploring new skills? It is typically because the first step in their agenda is too large and complex. What's that old acronym, KISS, Keep It Simple Sousa (or was it Shostakovich)? Instead of thinking you have to learn Flash, Dreamweaver, and QuarkExpress before you have your music therapy classes use computers, start with selecting some simpler entry tasks:

- Web searches, online e-books and prints, and library searches from common Web browsers
- Basic digital audio editing and with publishing music files on the web for sharing in QuickTime or MP3 format (start with software like the free, cross-platform title, Audacity)

- Bibliographic searches and formatting using software like EndNote or the online service, RefWorks, integrated with Microsoft Word
- Using PowerPoint for in-class notes, assignments, agendas etc. Just post to the Web after each class (I let mine expand with each class during a unit or throughout the semester)

4. Do I have the most flexible setup for using technology?

There is good news here! The hardware you need as an instructor couldn't be simpler. Go mobile! Get a laptop and add an inexpensive MIDI keyboard controller like the very portable 2-octave M-Audio O2 or Edirol PCR-1. Everything else is software! Well almost. Do a little research on alternative MIDI controllers for wind, drum, strings, and others, as well as special custom controllers for special needs students.

Why a laptop? Because you can take it every where. Use it in class, in your office or at home, at the library, at the concert for recording, and the local coffee shop. Carry a network cable, a stereo audio cable, and, for Mac users, a digital video to VGA video adapter in your bag with you (I also carry an extra battery). This should take care of being able to connect for presentations work just about anywhere.

5. Do I have a basic repertoire of music software that I can keep up to date with and use effectively (and feel in control of)?

Remember our KISS rule above. Look how much mileage Sousa got out of the march form, all 135 of them! Don't feel you have to conquer a lot of software to start making things happen in the college classroom. Here's my low-budget list for starters and it is pretty much cross platform, Mac and PC.

- Notation software (Finale or Sibelius) and their accompanying educational tools: MakeMusic!'s SmartMusic and Finale Performance Assessment, and Sibelius' Educational Suite. Restricted by budget, then go with NotePad or PrintMusic! or Sibelius Student version.
- Basic loop sequencer (GarageBand for Mac and ACID for PC)
- Band-in-a-Box for lots of creative possibilities from jazz to music styles
- Audacity for digital wave editing
- Music skills (choose one): Auralia, Practica Musica, MacGamut, and/or MiBAC Music Lessons

Put the following on your just-be-acquainted-with list: Reason; sequencers like Tracktion, Cubase, Logic, Sonar; soft synths like Kontakt, Garritan Personal Orchestra, Korg Legacy Collection, and many more.

6. Have I taken advantage of national support groups for music technology?

You won't find a group of professionals more willing to help their colleagues than music educators with technology expertise. Head for the nearest professional affiliation for

help. The National Association for Music Education (MENC), the College Music Society (CMS), and the Association for Technology in Music Instruction (ATMI) are three to reach out to. They all have web discussion groups for online help as well as conferences that provide training and sharing of music technology experience. It goes without saying that TI:ME is also a major resource for training and assistance.

For publications start with the various TI:ME publications and consider some of the key textbooks available such as Rudolph's *Teaching Music With Technology* (Rudolph, 1996) and the Williams and Webster *Experiencing Music Technology* (Williams, 2005) text now in its 3rd edition.

Let's return to Skinner's point in closing. You do not need to be the college instructor seeking an "unaided experience" with music technology skills. This checklist hopefully provides "positive reinforcement" for expanding your repertoire. TI:ME, MENC, and CMS, among others, are there to come to your rescue. And remember! Let your students take the lead with technology; you provide the aesthetic eye, ear, and hand to guide their experiences.

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