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Music, Technology and Classroom 2.0

Paul Draper

Introduction

Atari computers were first introduced into the Australian music classroom in the late 1980s, equipped as they were with MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) and a well developed suite of recording software. Since this time, the power to create of all kinds of multimedia has become available on every computer platform while the capacity to collaborate, share and review creative works has spread across the internet. This article suggests ways in which teachers may be able to utilise these tools more widely in the classroom.

Meddlers in the middle

Computer labs and student laptops are increasingly available across Australia's schools and universities but it would be fair to say that this level of technological infrastructure has not yet been met adequately by curriculum developments, pre-service training and other human resources. In some cases students are outpacing their teachers in terms of operational knowledge and online social networking, yet many educators remain concerned about a perceived drop in classroom engagement and overall literacy standards. While the written word remains central to how students develop and present their ideas, the music/multimedia computer lab also provides important resources which can be incorporated into teaching and learning by leveraging other forms of literacies that students now bring to the classroom.

Many students are highly active in online culture through Facebook, Myspace, YouTube and their iPods, often creating and sharing their own multimedia content produced on free or inexpensive applications available on their home computers. 'Web 2.0' has been used to describe this 21st century phenomenon, where people have now have remarkable options to create, collect, analyse, remix, share and comment on cultural artefacts globally. This essential shift in socially-constructed ways of knowing undermines the traditional Cartesian premise of knowledge objects that are sequentially transferred to the student via various traditional pedagogical strategies. A 'Classroom 2.0' perspective suggests that *we participate, therefore we are*¹ and shifts the focus from content delivery to facilitating interactions around the content.

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In this new educational landscape there is a shift in teaching from 'sage on the stage' and beyond 'guide on the side' to what leading educational researcher Erica McWilliam² terms 'meddler in the middle'. This links to the idea of students as co-creators in the classroom, where the framework for the particular subject is established and facilitated by the teacher, but uses different technologies and students' 'digital nativeness' to drive the outcomes. 'Meddling' then means time spent being a usefully ignorant co-worker in the thick of the action, being an experimenter, editor and assembler, being a collaborative critic and authentic evaluator. This can be enabled by utilising the lab resources already in place in many schools.

The computer lab in action

Music labs have traditionally been used in schools to compose, arrange and practice on MIDI keyboards using programs such as Finale and Sibelius, well known for their real-time music score interface. More recently however, new breeds of music software not only include score, but also the capacity to record, edit and produce sound and vision. These include Cubase, Logic, ProTools and FinalCut at the more sophisticated level, but also many free or open source applications can be bundled with computers. Apple computers provide iLife,³ a complete suite of photo editing, video recording, web site design and music tools. In the case of Windows PCs, a similar range of software is also available which can be incorporated into classroom teaching.⁴

All of these resources can be used more widely in the context of any subject matter because they provide ways in which students can extend their ideas and interactions by creating and sharing multimedia materials through processes similar to their out of school on-line social networking. For example, instead of asking students to write an essay about an aspect of Australian history, they might be encouraged to produce an audio work, designed along the lines of a radio program. Teams can be arranged to be responsible for different tasks in the process, while teachers and staff could take part in audio interviews for later editing and production. This necessarily requires a research-oriented approach in the evaluation of background material, deciding on questions, listening to interviews and searching on the web. The project can be scaled to fit student profiles, numbers and available resources. It might include photos in audio-visual slideshows or video productions using a USB enabled handycam for digital transfer and computer editing.

Another advantage of this approach includes dissemination. Audio and multimedia materials may be finalised and presented on CDs or DVDs to the teacher, just as in traditional assessment methods. However, there are also a range of evolving practices which take this material further, based on the informal and open learning aspects of social networking.⁵ Podcasting is one recent phenomena where audio visual materials can be circulated across either closed in-house communities of practice, or more widely across the internet among educational communities, student networks, alumni or parent groups. High quality work can continue to engage and interest participants and as public broadcasts, these original creations can serve to inspire a greater sense of student professionalism that may be lacking in closed assessment

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regimes. Inside the school itself, these works can provide tangible exemplars to other younger students as to how assessment tasks may be interpreted, what standards are to be met and in general, how to deal with issues of production and communication quality as determined appropriate to the subject matter.⁶

Photojournalism, video casting, wiki-oriented collaborative knowledge gathering, blogs and other tools are also available. If in doubt, teachers can ask students about some of the ways they engage in the on-line world and invite them to contribute on ideas which not only make use of the computer lab, but also allow students to become more responsible for their own learning through an acknowledgement of the literacies they can offer in the teaching and learning transaction. A good ICT department at the school can be of use, but also sometimes a hindrance in terms of one-size-fits-all standards, risk-management and accountability. If this is the case, there are any number of free tools and

external hosting sites increasingly used by international educational communities. YouTube, FaceBook, MySpace and others are being utilised by schools and their students to host and disseminate classwork outcomes.⁷

Ning is one free, external platform that deserves special mention. It has become somewhat of a beacon for those who wish to build educational social networks. Very easy to operate, a Ning account can be set up for free by a single teacher or a school team and this can provide a learning framework for lecture notes, lesson plans, discussion boards and a range of multimedia student content. Ning sites can be created or closed at will and any individual may create a number of sites for differing purposes, including private/public access levels or invitations to those who may wish to be enrolled. Students can assist in a familiar approach to set-up and design themes can be selected to customise the site for a particular use or style.⁸

Conclusion

Student media creation and social practices provide insights into 21st century literacies which, through global multimedia networks, perhaps offer the potential to make ancient intellectual approaches new yet once again. Almost two thousand years ago, the Roman rhetorician Quintilian wrote:

*It is impossible, except by actual practice, to make it clear how a boy is to learn when to take a fresh breath, where to make a pause in a verse, where the sense ends or begins, when the voice is to be raised or lowered, what inflection should be given to each phrase, and what should be spoken slowly or quickly, excitedly or calmly.*⁹

Punctuation once gave these performance clues but with the advent of the Gutenberg press and industrialisation, its meaning was subverted where text became almost exclusively consumed by silent reading. The networked world is now again full of social behaviour which ‘performs’ in attention economies and communities that demand effective production and communication competencies. This is a world that is now profoundly audio-visual.

*. . . [the old] model of communication had an economic basis – the economics of stuff . . . The advent of printed text only reinforced this stuff-based conception of human communication . . . we have a theory of communication that is based on a theory of economics that is based on a theory of morality that is based on a theory of self and society. It goes all the way down to the bedrock . . . A message is not a lump of coal, either delivered or not. It is not a message at all, in fact, unless it reaches the recipient and changes that person’s view of the world.*¹⁰

In many educational communities, new media literacies and the internet are now being used effectively to expand student views of the world. Teachers also put trust in the prospect that young people continue to challenge and change theirs.

Notes

- ¹ Brown, J. S. & Adler, R. P. (2008). Minds on fire: Open education, the long tail and learning 2.0. *EDUCAUSE Review*, 43(1), 16–32. Available at: www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ERM0811.pdf
- ² McWilliam, E. (2008). Unlearning how to teach. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 45(3), 263–269. Available at www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a794945187~db=all~jumtype=rss
- ³ For more information on Apple iLife software, see www.apple.com/au/ilife
- ⁴ For examples of using Windows PowerPoint and Movie Maker software in the classroom, see presentationsoft.about.com/od/classrooms/a/lesson_plans.htm Also see Audacity, a free audio editing application, available at audacity.sourceforge.net/download/windows

- ⁵ Examples of these kinds of classroom practices in action can be found on the US Carnegie Foundation's 'Inside Teaching' web site at gallery.carnegiefoundation.org/insideteaching and on Apple Australia's K-12 education site at www.apple.com/au/education/k12
- ⁶ Outcomes of this approach can be accessed at RadioIMERSD, an open publishing project of the Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University. This platform peer-reviews contributions much like a journal system. It uses creative commons licences for publication, and makes no delineation between student, staff or visitor material, presenting these as collaborations on common music themes. See www29.griffith.edu.au/radioimersd
- ⁷ For example, see the Bachelor of Popular Music YouTube channel at au.youtube.com/profile?user=bpopmusic and 'Inside Teaching' at gallery.carnegiefoundation.org/insideteaching
- ⁸ For more information on Ning, a good place to start is at the 'Ning in Education' site, available at education.ning.com
- ⁹ Quintilian (2001). *The orator's education*. Edited and translated by Donald A. Russell. 5 vols. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- ¹⁰ Lanham, R. A. (2006). *The economics of attention: Style and substance in the age of information*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Other recommended resources for teachers

Australia's free online network for educators www.edna.edu.au/edna/go

Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) www.atomqld.org

About the author



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