Whether a first-year teacher or a twenty-year veteran, each of us can remember anxiously preparing for those first days of teaching, when we had to figure things out for the very first time. And now as our class sizes and workloads increase and our student contact hours decrease, we are asked to do more in less time. In the midst of this reality, where do we find the motivation and passion to teach music?

Perhaps the answer involves the integration of technology. For many of us, learning to use technology in the classroom might remind us of our first teaching days, as we are again being challenged to try something new. As we consider technology in the classroom, it’s important to remember that it’s not about teachers and how they teach; it’s about students and how they learn. It’s not about replacing what we do; it’s about doing what we do better.

There has been a great emphasis lately on how today’s students are “digital natives.” In a January 20 New York Times article, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported that “the average young American now spends practically every waking minute—except for the time in school—using a Smart Phone, computer, television, or other electronic device. Those ages 8 to 18 spend more than seven and a half hours a day with such devices, compared with less than six and a half hours five years ago. And that does not count the hour and a half that youths spend texting, or the half-hour they talk on their cell phones. And because so many of them are multitasking—say, surfing on the Internet while listening to music—they pack, on average, 11 hours of media content into that seven and a half hours.” It’s an exciting time to be alive! As teachers, we have to embrace it. But are we prepared to reach these digital natives in our classrooms?

Many technology solutions are available to help educators reach these digital natives—classroom computers, wireless laptops, projectors, document cameras, wireless slates, interactive response systems, MP3 players, and more. One tool we have found to be particularly effective is the interactive whiteboard (IWB).

If you can use a computer, you can use an IWB. It’s that easy! The IWB is a presentation device that connects to a computer. The computer images are displayed on the board by a projector, where they can be seen and manipulated. You can control computer applications from the computer in the traditional way by using a mouse. With the IWB, you can also control the applications from the board’s touch-sensitive screen, using your fingers as a mouse. Notes can be written on the board in digital ink, and work can be saved for presentation later.
Why Use an Interactive Whiteboard?

For students, an IWB becomes a place where they meet for creative fun and learning. An IWB is a kid-magnet—students of all ages are attracted to it. It’s colorful, and its interactive nature increases student motivation and participation. It accommodates all abilities and learning styles (visual, auditory, tactile/kinesthetic) and is an effective tool for students with special needs. An IWB and its software can be powerful tools to make your lessons come alive!

As for the teacher, the use of an IWB can bridge the gap between the digital world of our students and the classroom. The flexibility and scope of imaginative lesson planning seems limitless. The IWB enables the use of multimedia resources and the Internet with the whole class. In classrooms where the teacher has access to only one computer, an IWB maximizes its use by allowing all students to view the computer screen. Students can work together, with individuals contributing at the board and the group as a whole discussing the activity.

Lessons can be modified, saved, and stored digitally from year to year, with everything in one place. Lessons are easier to edit and tailor to the diversity of the students. Well-crafted IWB lessons can keep the teacher organized and on task. Efficiency is increased, and levels of stress can be reduced.

There are numerous brands of IWBs, including SMART Technologies, Promethean ActivBoard, Numonics, Polyvision, Hitachi Starboard, Interwrite, Mimio, and eBeam. According to Futuresource Consulting, in 2007 only 6% of North American classrooms had IWBs. Just three years later, this presence has increased to 37% of North American classrooms and is expected to increase to over 60% by 2013. The leading producer of IWBs today is SMART Technologies. Since our district chose SMART Boards, at this point, we will share more on how we have incorporated this specific brand of IWB into our classroom instruction.

Our SMART Board History

When SMART Boards were introduced in our district in 2005, we became interested in learning ways we could use them in the elementary music classroom. We attended a training class to learn more about the SMART Board and its software. We jumped in with both feet, installed the software on our laptops, and spent some time on our own learning about what it could do.

Excited about how it could transform our classrooms, we attended every training session that was available. We discovered that the more we learned about SMART Boards and SMART Notebook software, the more impressed we were with this incredible technology tool! It has breathed new life into our classrooms, and we’re convinced that we wouldn’t want to live without it!

How It’s Used

The SMART Board is much more than a traditional whiteboard. Anything you can do on a regular whiteboard can be done on a SMART Board, but the SMART Board makes it interactive. A Notebook page can contain what you would normally write on or attach to a whiteboard. This can be saved for use at a later time, or printed and distributed to students. You can create original, colorful, exciting, engaging, and interactive lessons using the Notebook software. Make it once, save your work, and you have it forever. Never again do you have to search for or remake that chart or manipulative.

Everything you produce on a computer can be displayed and made interactive on a SMART Board, including:

- Video (DVDs, YouTube, TeacherTube, etc.)
- Sound (iTunes, Realplayer, Windows Media Player, etc.)
- Worksheets (Microsoft Word, PDFs, etc.)
- PowerPoint presentations
- Websites
- Software

A SMART Board is more fun to write on and work from than a traditional whiteboard. With a SMART Board, you can step away from the board and empower your students to learn.

A SMART Board Baker’s Dozen

While the possibilities are endless, the following are some ideas for how to use a SMART Board or other IWB:

- Create lessons that include pictures of instruments and attach sound to the pictures, so that when you touch them, the sound of the instrument is played. A video of an expert playing the instrument can also be inserted.
- Learn the names of the lines and spaces by dragging notes to the appropriate place on the staff.
- Compose a piece of music directly on the board by inserting treble and bass clefs, time signature, bar lines, dynamic and tempo markings, notes, etc.
- Read and perform pieces of music by singing, playing pitched and unpitched percussion instruments, playing recorder, and performing body percussion. Insert sound to accompany the performance.
- Use different colored digital pens to circle music symbols and note values and write teaching points directly on the music notation displayed.
- Display listening maps (with sound attached) and Orff charts. Create Orff charts by dragging pictures of instruments to corresponding words or sections.
- Design sorting games—for classification of voices, instruments, musical symbols, etc.
- Create digital flash cards containing rhythm and melodic patterns and for naming notes, instruments, and composers.
- Incorporate music software (e.g., Music Ace, Sibelius Groovy Music series).
- Use with music websites (e.g., DSO Kids, Ricci Adams’s musictheory.net).
- Document brainstorming activities on it. When taking notes, students use different colored pens to write something they know about whatever they’re studying (a composer, an instrument family, etc.). Notes can be saved and modified or added to at a later time.
- Create and play games using online templates or use a purchased CD (such as “DooZie”).
- Take a quiz or assess for comprehension using an interactive response system. And many more—the sky’s the limit!

Making a Case for Purchasing Interactive Whiteboards

While it is true that acquiring an IWB and a projector is an expense, the use of this setup can also be viewed as a cost-cutter, as it makes it possible for one computer to serve multiple students. Work with your district’s technology department to determine how your district might support this expense. Pricing will vary, since buying multiple boards can
lower the overall cost. Also, boards come in several different sizes, and this can affect price as well. Software is typically included and can be downloaded after your purchase of the IWB.

Is an IWB just a toy or a gimmick? Absolutely not! With proper training, preparation, and planning, an IWB is a powerful instructional tool that can be adapted for a multitude of uses in the music classroom. Like the successes you experienced beyond those anxious first days as a new teacher, you can look forward to new successes as you begin reaching your students on a more meaningful level through the use of technology.

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