# Suggestions for Designing Technology-Based Music Classes

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As music educators continue to create, design, and refine technology-based music classes, we have the opportunity to create a new strand of music classes in our middle and high schools. As each course is designed, it is important to carefully examine the aims and objectives for these courses, in order to fully realize this opportunity. This requires a fresh start, as opposed to creating technology-based music classes based on existing curricular models, which are effective in reaching 20% of middle and high school students. The following are my suggestions for principles to consider when creating a technology-based music class that will help serve the other 80%.

## Music Before Technology

Insuring that technology serves music instruction (rather than vice versa) has been a consistent theme in the music education technology literature (Reese and Davis, 1998; Williams and Webster, 2006). Unless a course is designed as vocational education (i.e. preparing students for a job in music recording or production), the primary focus should be on teaching musical concepts and skills and not on the technology itself. While some instruction in particular software or hardware is inevitably necessary, this instruction should be limited to only what is needed to allow the student to function musically in a particular environment. Musical learning will remain valuable for students, while operating outdated software programs will not.

### *Deepen, Then Broaden*

Technology-based music classes should be designed to deepen, and then broaden students' musical experiences.  All students bring a wealth of informal music understanding or intuition from their everyday experience.  The role of music classes then is to draw upon the students' implicit knowledge of music and transform their musical intuition into more explicit, clarified understandings. Technology-based music classes should begin this process of deepening musical understanding by utilizing styles of music familiar to the student.  Later in the course, the curriculum should transition to broadening students' musical horizons by moving toward less familiar genres.

Since the primary music role of the adult population is that of listener, the primary goal of these courses should be to developing students' listenership.  While this is achieved by having students actively involved in creating, performing, as well as listening to music, the primary aim of activities in each mode should ultimately be to inform the listener role.

### *Individualized Instruction*

As Woodford (2005) notes, many music education classrooms remain highly autocratic.  Technology-based music classes offer the structural flexibility to provide greater student autonomy, a necessity for providing instruction that leads to thoughtful, independent musical citizens. Unlike performance classrooms, which are limited by high student to teacher ratios and large group focus, technology-based music classes lend themselves to individualized instruction where different groups or individuals in the class can be working on entirely separate projects without interfering with one another. These projects should be differentiated according to the standard criteria that are the hallmark of

the Differentiated Instruction movement (student readiness, student interest, and student learning style) (Tomlinson, 1999).

Additionally, through the course of the class, students should experience multiple styles of music, and should experience the roles of creator (composer or improviser), performer, and listener at least once. Another aspect to consider is the utilization of informal musical learning. Green (2002, 2008) has provided an interesting alternative approach to music learning, drawn from the 'garage band' experiences of popular musicians. When designing musical experiences for students, teachers should seek to differentiate by level of formality, providing the appropriate level of structure for each student or groups of students to maximize their engagement with musical materials. Given that many of these students have self-selected out of participating in the more formal performance classes, it is likely that a significant portion of the students in these classes are seeking greater autonomy and would respond well to more informal learning structures.

By creating courses that utilize technology to individually broaden and deepen students' musical understanding and skills, music educators have the opportunity to reach a new range of students, and increase our impact upon our musical culture.

## References

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