

MUSIC TECHNOLOGY AT KS3

Since April 2001 I have been working on the Bristol University Interactive Education Research Project which aims to examine ways in which new technologies can be used in educational settings to enhance learning. This project has given me the time to reflect on how I use ICT in KS3 lessons, to discuss with primary and secondary teachers from other schools and to see examples of good practice.

In the last few years there has been a massive drive to incorporate ICT into every aspect of school life. £1.7 billion has been invested in training, hardware and software in UK schools but unfortunately secondary school music departments have been at the back of the queue in terms of these new resources. Music Technology offers unique benefits in the classroom in terms of the use of repetition, control over layered sound and pupils can easily make refinements to their compositions. When used appropriately ICT can widen pupils' understanding of music without being dependant on performing skills. Music sequencing has created new opportunities to students who might not otherwise have shown an interest in the subject. In my own department numbers at KS4 have increased which could be attributed to our increasing use of Music Technology at KS3.

We as music teachers constantly need to be reminding our schools that our pupils are entitled to better and more ICT resources. Music departments need access to specialist hardware and software and Senior Management Teams need to be aware that our needs are very different to other departments.

The DFES recommends that music departments should have the following to help pupils' learning at Key Stage 3.

- Digital effects units with decent quality microphones and amplification.
- Computers with high quality soundcards and in sufficient quantity to enable all pupils in a class to work in pairs at the same time.
- Sequencing software eg Logic, Cubasis.
- MIDI keyboards.
- Sampling and processing software.
- 8- or 16-channel mixer linked to one computer and digital effects unit.
- Classroom-based PA system (linked to the mixer).
- Music notation software - eg Sibelius.
- Four-track tape recorders.

- DJ turntables or mixing devices.
- CD writer.
- Minidisk recorder with stereo microphone.
- Interactive whiteboard or digital projector.
- Internet links in the music classroom.

This is certainly an ambitious list and sounds like a department of the future rather than one that actually exists in South Gloucestershire. Very few music departments will have all or most of these resources. If you are in the early stages of establishing music technology in your department and funds are limited it may be worth investing in sequencing keyboards with disk drives. These have improved in quality and are a cheap way of teaching sequencing to KS3 classes. The Casio 731 at about £190 is a good bargain with a 6 track sequencer and functions such as quantising and looping.



Secondary Heads of Music at the recent forum trying out the new keyboard lab at SBL

According to Ofsted music teachers use ICT effectively with KS4 classes but use is less secure with KS3 classes. This may be due to size of classes. Research also shows that the effective use of ICT in music lessons is not yet widespread. Some departments have no access to computers whereas other schools have two music computer suites. Hopefully with more resources nationally ICT will be used more effectively in music lessons. Equipment also needs to be used to full effect as a teaching and learning tool. For example, pupils sometimes use keyboards as pianos rather than utilising the more sophisticated functions.

When teaching sequencing for the first time to a KS3 classes it is probably a good idea to use templates within your sequencing programme. A sequencing program such as Cubasis or Logic can look confusing to a KS3 pupil so try deleting all the tracks that you don't need including the audio tracks and save it as a template for that particular lesson/ scheme of work. Template song files keep the pupils on task and tracks created by the teacher can be muted for those more able pupils.

Unfortunately most music teachers have to deal with the technical maintenance of the computers in their department and this can take up a great deal of lesson time. Try and keep several steps ahead of your students so you can troubleshoot the problems that will occur. If necessary take the equipment home or if possible via the teachers' laptop scheme have a similar set up at home. As music teachers we are not meant to be technicians but some technical knowledge can go a long way. Very few music departments have their own IT technicians but try and enlist the support of the technicians in your school. When you purchase computers for your department insist that your school gives you the opportunity to receive training on any new software.

ICT has the potential to be invaluable in many areas of music teaching and when it is working well it makes our job a lot easier. The use of ICT needs to be planned in schemes of work and in development plans. It also needs to be used for a clear musical purpose rather than being used just because you have computers in the room. If your pupils can get better results using other methods it is not appropriate to use ICT. Music Technology should integrate with other resources and activities that you have already established in your department.

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