

Integrating Music Technology in Your Classroom: A Journey From Purist to Tech Evangelist

Dr. Glenn Pohland, DMA

Technology in my school's band room? For years, I was a musical purist—insisting that my ears alone would do the assessments, tuning, and artistic shaping. I had studied instrumental conducting with giants like Dick Strange, who taught me what gets the best results from students. I held a doctorate in instrumental music education from Arizona State. I didn't need technology in my music room, or in my way.

Admittedly, the Conn Strobotuner my high school director used would be a good tool. Perhaps a pocket metronome would be helpful when I didn't have the exact tempo—although I was sure I was within 6 clicks of being right anyway. Still, I thought putting a computer into the band room was a far-fetched idea. I was a music educator, not a computer geek. My students worked with me at the helm to discover the joys of music making. I guided their journey with my instructions, gestures, and baton. Melodies, rhythms, harmonies, phrases, intonation and nuances were at my command. I knew my students were achieving intuitively by the sounds they made and the look of

awe on their faces. In short, I was the conductor and they were the students.

Fast forward to my school today and you'll see a remarkably different experience for my students. There's a computer directly behind my podium, and a computer projector displaying the rhythm of the week on a four by four foot screen. Six practice rooms are equipped with computers; each has a music accompaniment system and music notation program loaded on them. The sounds of 'virtual' accompaniment, digitally recorded, supports my students as they prepare for solo and ensemble contests.

Although I transitioned from little technology to a classroom that's filled with computers, I went through several steps to facilitate that evolution. What follows is a description of the steps that you might also take as a music educator on your journey:

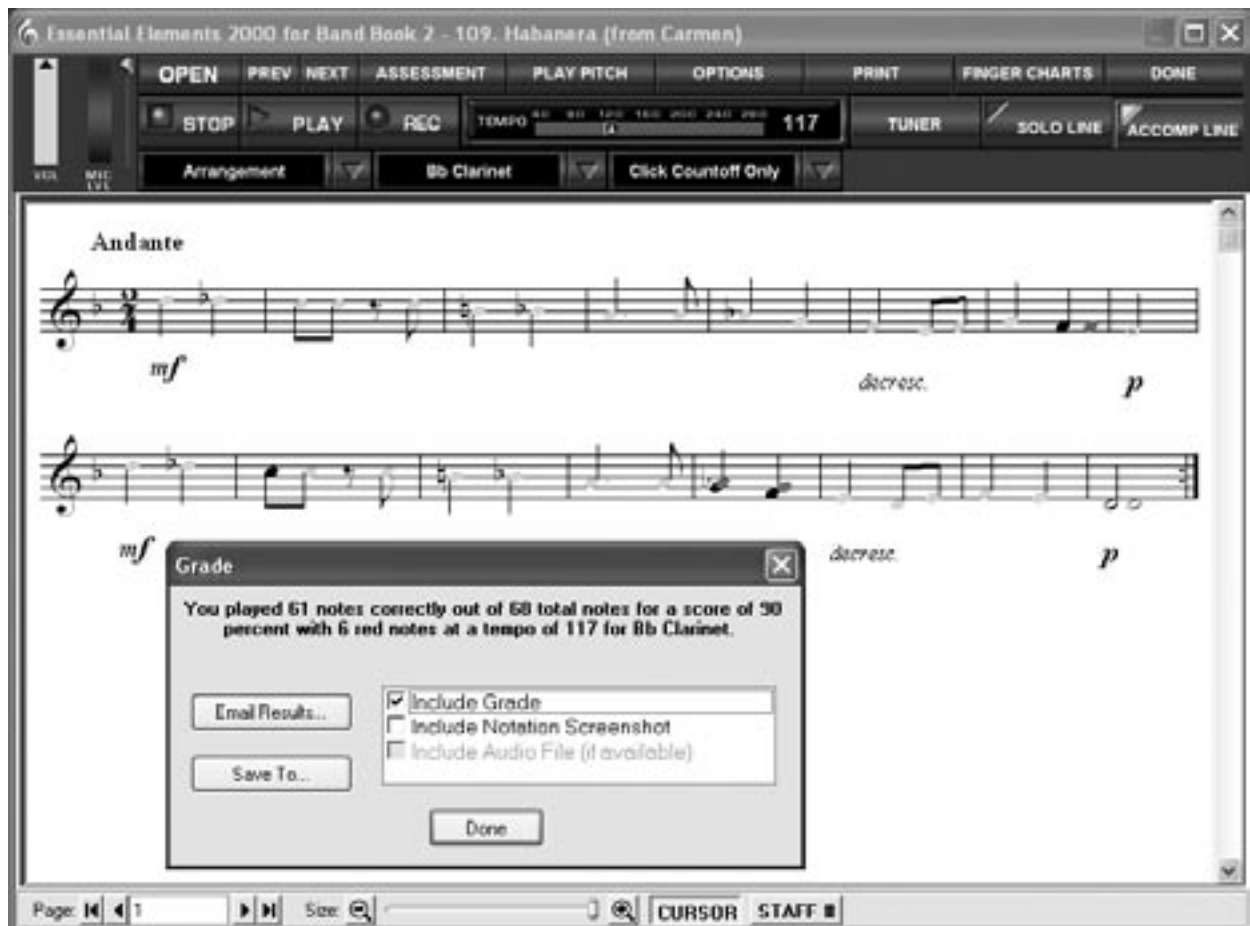
Convincing Parents, Principals, and School Board Members To Buy In To Technology

Getting parents, principals, and school board members to

embrace—and fund —new technology is a challenge, but I have some recommendations. First, when making your presentation about funding, always have students in the room with you. For example, I produced a 20-minute demonstration of our use of music education software for a school board meeting, using 5th and 6th grade trumpet, baritone, clarinet and drummers to play selections. The six school board members were amazed that this type of technology existed—when the notes played changed from black to green and red (indicating notes played correctly and incorrectly), they sat up and said, "How did your students do that?" Most of all, the school board welcomed the software-facilitated assessments, which enable me to meet with parents and tell them, "Your Steven got 90% on that passage today, but when he started he was only doing 76%" (see example on page 26.)

I recommend music educators meet with a school's IT personnel. I approached our school's tech guy, showed him how I wanted keyboards in practice rooms for composition, and he helped me

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write a grant to win the funds for our classroom. When I do clinics for music educators, I'm floored when they admit to me: "My IT guy? I don't even know his name."

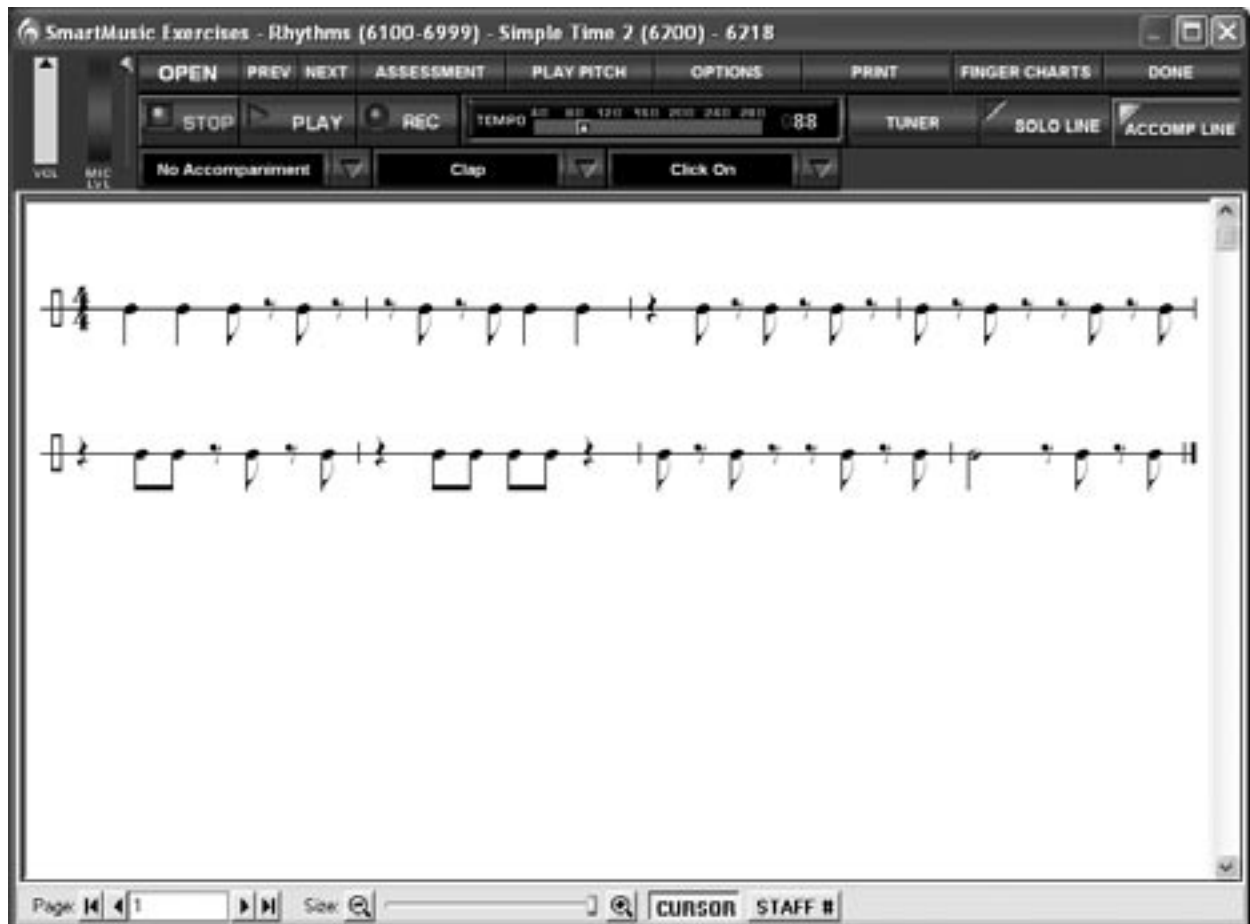
And, of course, you have to win over the parents. Each year, I bring mothers and fathers of our fifth graders into class before the school year begins—one of the segments we share is a demonstration with students performing an exercise that incorporates the accompaniment software I use such as "Hot Cross Buns." I tell the parents: "Many of you can help your child with their math homework, but few of you are likely to know how to help them practice music. Fortunately, the new software helps our kids

practice correctly." Last year we had 63 beginning music students, and 55 of the parents signed up for a music accompaniment software subscription at home. Another strategy we use to win over parents is our 7th and 8th grade compact disc project, which we start each October so students can create their own CDs in time to be given as holiday gifts.

Technology in the Band Room

So, I've come to accept that technology in the band room as critical to music enrichment. While I've not abandoned the rehearsal techniques of my mentors, I've incorporated technological advances to respond to the demand for accountability. Enter my band

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room and you'll see the rhythm of the day on the screen (see example above.) I ask students to silently count and be prepared to clap the rhythm when called upon. I ask one student or a section to execute this example, while the computer listens. Because of the nature of the program, the black note heads on the screen turn either red or green. Red indicates that the notes were incorrect, while green indicates that the notes were accurately performed. With a click of the mouse, my students can view their score and benefit from feedback about their performance.

Building your own lessons and band warm-ups is an easy process if the school has a notation software program that comes with exercises built

in. How often do band directors rehearse the same spots over and over again? Creating an assessment from the literature in student folders is an element of the current technology. Students can view their assessment and then "strut their stuff" for the director. The motivation of getting all of the green notes has inspired my students to work harder on their music.

Documenting Student Progress

An added benefit to the new technology is the visible and audible evidence of achievement that music educators need for assessments. My students regularly use software on their home or practice room computers to complete assignments that reinforce

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what we are doing in band. When a principal or parent questions a student's music grade, you now can have the "proof" in the form of saved assessments and recordings. Saving a student's recording of a scale, rhythm or solo is like saving a word processing file. You have a physical record of a student singing or playing that example, just as a math teacher has a student's paper exam.

Technology in my band room? Today, I accept it. Incorporating new music technology into rehearsals clearly improves my students' achievements and my accountability as a teacher.

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And although many seem to believe that school should be all work, the technology enables my students to actually have fun rehearsing. Combining the drive for "getting a perfect score" with the immediate feedback of practice software that, to students, acts like a video game, the new era of music technology is transforming the notion of how enjoyable practice can be, and how far and how fast our students can move forward musical excellence. Practice actually becoming fun—what would I, the musical purist, have thought of that 10 years ago?