

# Effecting Today's Music Students... Generally, with Technology

Albert Vela

The Band Hall is under attack! An invasion has occurred that causes all young minds to become completely entranced by a foreign body that requires all attention - Before - During - and After Class!

Spoiler alert - *it's technology.*

Watches, tablets, headphones, and yes, the almighty phone are here and won't be going anywhere anytime soon.

*So how do we harness this technology to benefit our students?*

Simply put, **MODELING**. Teachers modeling the successful integration of technology into the music learning process. Students CAN BENEFIT from the technology they wear and carry in their pockets!

*So how do you model something that may still seem new?*

Well, the same way we learn to walk, talk, and Instagram about our favorite lunch...OBSERVE, BE BRAVE, and TAKE CHANCES when it comes to using technology in the classroom.

I'd like to share with you some common problems in the teaching arena and some simple ways the integration of technology with an app like *TonalEnergy* can benefit your classroom and students.

## Data and Streaks

Today's society is experiencing a Personal Data Collection revolution regarding how much information one can track about themselves. Using the Snapchat messaging app, all one

must do to begin a streak is Snap a friend and have a friend Snap back. That counts as "1". I have personally heard students discuss their streaks of well over 100 (200 total messages sent) and the lengths they will go to have these streaks remain active when their parents take away their phone for whatever reason. (You lose your streak if you miss a day.)

So... the real question is: *How can we potentially harness the amazing minds of these brilliant young individuals?*

The *TonalEnergy Practice Streaks* tracker allows you and your students to see how many days in a row they have opened *TonalEnergy* for practice.

Simple. That's it.

Opening a music practice app everyday increases your odds of ACTUALLY practicing! As an added carrot, YOU as a teacher can track your own personal streak and share with your students! There is nothing more enticing than the slightest opportunity for a student to be able to hold their practice streak up and best their teacher! It's the little things.

Additionally, you can set a daily practice goal (in increments of five minutes) and have the app tell you when you have met your daily goal. Simple.

As an added bonus, you can share your streak and daily practice time in as many ways as you can share on your device.

**ALBERT'S CHALLENGE:** Share your OWN streak to your email, hit

print and post on your board challenging your own students to show their streaks or even better...beat your streak!

You can view your streak when opening the app, by tapping the purple lightning

bolt/counter on the tuner page, or by going to the Preferences page (bottom right tap of TE app).

## A Metronome is More Than Just a Beat

A metronome is easily one of the most important, valuable tools that a young person can use to improve their individual musicianship. It promotes consistency of time from the practice room, the band room, and the marching field. Without this steady beat, students would truly be marching to the beat of a different drummer! Even non-musician superintendents, principals, and parents can tell when something is just a little "off" in a performance.

What happens when using only a standard metronome is not enough to communicate the musical intent that a composer wishes to portray through



## Effecting Today's Music Students...Generally, with Technology

sudden dramatic tempo changes, joyful accelerandos, or emotional rallentandos?

Yes, you may be able to execute the musical decisions on your own with your trusty baton, or by cleverly manipulating the dial on a box metronome, but how can you ensure that each student can practice the same expression on their own? I mean, we do want our students to practice on their own, right?

Cue the ClickTrack (or Preset group) as an easy way to save tempos, modify tempos, and share tempos so that CONSISTENCY can be achieved across all musicians and you can spend more time of perfecting your performance.

Recently, one of our bands performed an exciting arrangement of the "Black Panther" soundtrack. We conducted a student project where the kids were encouraged to listen to music on the publisher websites and then choose what they would want to perform. Through a class vote, we selected a piece. After a quick listen and quick glance at the sample score page, I purchased the music.

WOW did this piece turn out to be a lot more "FUN" than initially planned! Many tempo changes and several triplet-based rhythms later, I knew we could learn the piece, but wanted to find a way for the students to REALLY get into it during their own individual practice time.

So, I created a ClickTrack with all the tempo changes and measures of triplets that would help students with the appropriate subdivision when practicing on their own. After two days of work with the ClickTrack in class and after sharing the ClickTrack with the students, they went home to practice the music THEY were so excited to play. "Black Panther" was coming together...sans metronome!

Yes, we still used the tool for practice, but the students had GAINED such a firm understanding of how the subtle and sudden tempo changes worked! We had SOO much more fun as an ensemble!

### Ensemble Singing (that means performing together)

More often than not, young musicians are hesitant to sing aloud in an ensemble setting. They "can't" sing, they are unhappy with how they sound, or they don't fully understand how singing can benefit their musicianship.

Over the years, I have found that a simple way to build a students' vocal confidence is to introduce a concept that is easier and lower risk than singing out loud - *humming*.

The exercise that we use as a pathway to tonality is called "Hum - Sing - Play". The focus is to transfer a low-risk, successful skill and immediately make it apply to playing their instrument. We utilize the *TonalEnergy* drones (any drone will do), a Bluetooth speaker, and a simple series of instructions to

encourage students to think less about WHAT they are actually doing and focus on the process of performing the "Hum - Sing - Play" exercise.

Use 3-single handed cues (I use gestures rather than words to promote students' eyes being UP.)

- Humming - Closed Hand
- Singing - Open 'C' Hand
- Playing - Flat Hand or Conducting Hand

A simple procedure to get you off the ground is below. (Use a sustained drone on Concert F or Bb at first.)

- Hum x 3
- Sing x 3 ("dah" or "doo")
- Play x 3

Give a few quick comments like "try humming louder this time" or "try finding the pitch faster this time and get right back at it!"

Try changing pitches on the next rep or try two pitches (like a Perfect 5th). Once the process is established, you can easily transition the exercise to perform:

- The last chord of a marching show
- The first tone of an ensemble chorale and then continue into PERFORMING the chorale
- Or change the exercise and continue singing or humming on the notes of a scale (changing the drone tones to give them a chance at success!)



## Effecting Today's Music Students...Generally, with Technology

Before you know it, your ensemble is singing on a DAILY basis! And suddenly, singing is not something “I can’t do”, but something “We do!”

**ALBERT’S CHALLENGE:** Hit the record bottom in *TonalEnergy* and immediately play the exercise back to your students! See what they think about their performance!

I hope that some of these ideas have sparked just a LITTLE creativity in how you can let technology invade YOUR band hall for the betterment of your students.

Smart phones aren’t going away anytime soon! Why not show the kids how to use them!

Have a question? I’d be happy help - [Avela@conroeisd.net](mailto:Avela@conroeisd.net).

*Albert Vela has been involved in many facets of music education over his decade of teaching, including Assistant Director of Bands at Oak Ridge High School, Brass Staff with the Blue Devils, and the Curriculum and Media Specialist at TonalEnergy. At Oak Ridge, Mr. Vela leads instruction for the marching band and conducts/co-conducts three of the concert bands.*

