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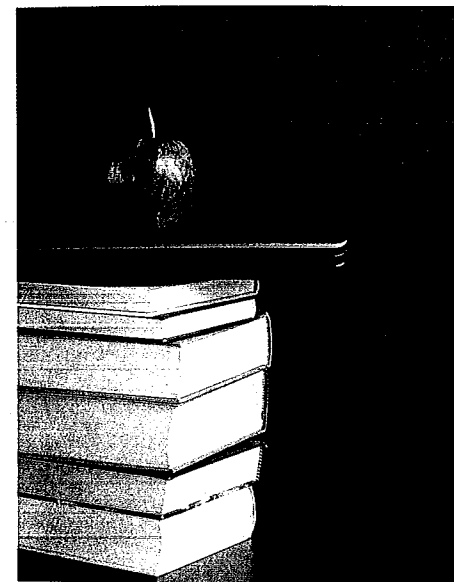
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» words David Ashworth

# INSIGHT

## Technology: who is leading whom?

A few weeks ago, Youth Music ran a Breakfast Seminar titled 'Fresh Thinking for Music Education'. The presenters were mainly from outside the formal music education sector and it was fascinating to hear their perspective. One of them trotted out the 'actually, when it comes to music technology the teachers should learn from the students' argument and, predictably, the others on the panel nodded in agreement.



The problem with this statement is not just that it is untrue. It is that, when repeated often enough, people actually start to believe it – mantra becomes dogma. It is a lazy statement for two reasons. Firstly, it stops us having to think in any depth about how students *really* engage with technology. Secondly, it lets teachers off the hook, encouraging a *laissez faire* attitude.

I've never been totally convinced by this concept of digital natives/digital immigrants. It has always seemed like an oversimplification. I think there is a danger that we romanticise the technological creativity of our students. While large numbers now upload material online, most of this material is photographic. Creating and publishing original narrative, video or music is not currently a regular pastime for most of our students.

I have seen students instantly taking to music software – rapidly being able to create drum loops, ostinatos, importing and converting mp3s and WAVs and applying digital effects. But when it comes to assembling these

materials into a coherent musical piece, they hit a brick wall. They may apply special effects but they do not know why they are applying the special effect.

That is where the teachers need to step in – modelling standard basic techniques such as developing a motif, structuring a composition, explaining the effective use of contrast, adding layers of sound etc. All the traditional skills still apply.

Recently, I was working with a group of Year 9s who were using a sampler app on iPads. They had sampled phrases played live by a professional trumpeter. These were extracts from a commission for a large scale work combining various youth ensembles and professionals players. The intention was that the music created by this emerging iPad ensemble would become a section of the completed work. The students were given the task of coming up with interesting musical ideas for working with their sampled sounds, while the composer-in-residence and myself set up the PA/mixer for amplifying and recording the results. This they were quite happy to do. Headphones on, they found quiet corners and doodled away.

Ten minutes later, we went to find out what they had been doing. Sure enough, they had all worked out how to use the functional capabilities of the sampler and were coming up with some interesting ideas. One was playing the sample at original pitch and superimposing the sample at an octave higher to create a double time effect. Another student had reversed and trimmed the sample, a third had found an arpeggio function and was playing the sample using close intervals way above the original pitch, and so on.

But that was it. They had no idea as to how they could possibly use these doodles to create a musical work. Through discussion, we were able to explore together the musical potential: which ones sound good together? Which ones would make a good ostinato? Which ones should be used more sparingly? Are they all a bit high pitched? What would it sound like if we played some of them an octave or two lower? How can we build a narrative using these materials? Which one should we start with?

At the moment many of our youngsters are not digital natives. They are better described as digital dilettantes, and our job is to change that.

[musicteachermagazine.co.uk](http://musicteachermagazine.co.uk)

### IN BRIEF

#### ARTS COUNCIL DATA RETURNS MADE EASIER

Music education software provider Paritor is publishing a new system that will enable music hubs to complete their Arts Council data returns online. The new system will run as part of Paritor's new social media platform, Schooble, coming into effect from 5 September.

The new system simplifies the data return processes into three steps:

1. Music hub administrators will import users into the data returns system
2. Imported users will then receive an email with a direct link and sign-in details
3. Users can follow this link to enter their data return information and send it to the music hub administrator for compilation and extraction

#### NEW CAREERS ADVICE CHARITY TO AID 'SOCIAL MOBILITY'

MyBigCareer, which will be launched in the London borough of Hackney in September, will offer bespoke programmes to 'raise children's aspirations'. As part of the scheme, careers advisers from leading independent schools will volunteer to share their time and expertise with pupils in the state sector. The charity, which lists Dr Vince Cable, the Business Secretary, as its patron, is being piloted in Hackney before being spread to other parts of the country.