

Sound analysis

Sometimes a written report just can't do a subject justice. It's certainly true for music classes, where the addition of sound lets you hear the music being analyzed.

Seventh-graders at Park Junior High in LaGrange Park used that extra dimension for "Music Review Live." Music teacher Kelly Paetsch had students analyze a song, and then create a Podcast of their analysis. The students had already discussed song elements such as rhythm, harmony and lyrics in class. They could choose their own song and download it from a CD into iTunes. They also used a "listening log" to help answer specific questions about musical elements of the song. They transcribed the lyrics and analyzed those as well.

Using the information they'd gleaned, they wrote a script for a music review that analyzed and critiqued the song and its elements. They recorded the reviews using GarageBand, which Paetsch found worked well with both music and spoken word and also allowed students to add other elements, such as sound effects. Students could clip short portions of the song—an introduction or a solo, for example—to work in throughout the review, or they could simply play one longer segment.

After creating the reviews, students exported their reviews to iTunes, where they were prepared for sharing as Podcasts and then posted for internal use on the district's Web site.

Rather than presenting each review individually to the class, Paetsch set aside one day for listening; students paired up to share a computer and listened to the Podcasts of their own choosing. And after that, she adds, they can still go back to listen to them any time throughout the year on the Web site.

The project was popular with students, reports Paetsch, and she also found Podcasts a useful format for students who might not have been as facile with the written word. And while the project aimed

to hone students' tech and listening skills, she says, "it's also an analysis that's more entertaining than a traditional paper report."

Getting under the hood

The most imaginative software program in the world won't do much good if your computer doesn't work.

To get a better idea of how computer hardware actually operates, students at Lincoln Middle School in Berwyn spend a week in the school's Applied Technology Lab learning what makes their computers tick. The class was developed not only to give students a better understanding of the technology, but also to solve simple computer issues that could crop up in everyday use.

Students learn to identify basic components of hardware such as the motherboard and processor, memory, video and sound cards, and removable storage. Students then team up in groups of two or three and get to work on the lab's collection of older computers. They take off the case, locate where various components go, locate areas where basic troubleshooting or maintenance techniques could apply—and then put it all back together in working condition. They also receive printed materials for reference, and are quizzed on the project at the end of the week.

The lab was originally aimed at eighth-graders, but has expanded down to seventh grade as well. Students really like the class, says Rosaleen McSwiney, technology instructor at the school. "It's very hands-on, very independent," she says. "They get their own screwdrivers, they get down on the carpet and we encourage them to explore as much as they want."

Disassembling the units, though, does come with one caveat, she adds. "We do tell them, 'Don't try this at home.'"