

Rick's Place

Notes, Thoughts, and Random Musings on the Online Experience
by Rick Hein, AMIS web master

"There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing were a miracle. The other is as if everything were a miracle."

Albert Einstein

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

Arthur C. Clarke

As we approach the midway point in our academic year, the topic in this column generally turns to "what are the new gadgets for Christmas". The festive season is one way that our personal stock of technology can be increased, to almost quote the fab four "with a little help from our friends".

The first is a set of tools to help you in your classroom. No, really. We all have a variety of devices that we use to record our progress day by day. Many of your classrooms have state of the art stereo systems. But how many of you record your group on a regular basis and offer them the chance to reflect on their performance and the changes that have taken place in their performance over time? Wouldn't you like to have a one touch recording system that you can carry easily and set up at a moment's notice? Here's a candidate for that magical combination.

Apple's new iPod has the ability to record at CD quality. It does not, however, have any form of built in microphone. Previous iPods had the ability to record at "voice memo" quality which is unsuitable for music. A third party, xtrememac has introduced a device, the micromemo, which has a small microphone that clips on the iPod dock connector and allows for direct one click recording to the iPod. The files are stored as uncompressed .wav files in mono and transferred to iTunes when you connect the iPod to your computer. The micromemo works with the new "Fifth Generation" iPods that playback video. It will not work with the iPod Nano or Shuffle.

Once your recordings are on your computer in iTunes, (free - remember?), it is about a three click process to burn an audio cd. You can also just store them on your iPod and computer. Immediate playback can take place when you connect your iPod to a set of powered speakers or plug it into your classroom stereo and press "Play". The recordings consume about 10 megabyte per minute of stereo audio. Recording a fifteen minute session will use about 150 megabytes. The smaller iPod with its 30 gigabyte hard drive will hold at least 100 hours of stereo recording, plus about 3,000

songs from your music library. The larger iPod holds 80 gigbytes, so you can more than double those figures.

I hear you say, "Mono - I thought that died with bell bottoms and paisley shirts? Yet you've given us stereo recording times - what gives?" You're right: there's more. The small microphone on its flexible stalk can be removed, revealing a 3.5 mm socket. Many of you will already have a battery powered stereo microphone, like the Sony ECM-MS907. Pop a fresh battery in it, turn it on, plug it in, press record. You're now recording at CD quality in stereo. Flick the small switch on the micromemo from "Mic" to "Line" and you can record at CD quality straight off your mixing desk or home stereo. Yes, you can now digitise all of those priceless LPs that have never and will never be reissued as CDs. Certainly these small boxes must contain some serious magic!

The second gift you can give can be shared with everyone you know. It is free. Visit <http://www.pandora.com>. Pandora is Internet radio, but with a difference. It is an outgrowth of the Music Genome project. A group of musicians analysing music in terms of melody, harmony and rhythm, to instrumentation, orchestration, arrangement, lyrics, and of course the rich world of singing and vocal harmony. You create a radio station by requesting a song or an artist. Pandora then sifts its musical genome database and finds songs that are genetically "like" the one you selected. It then creates a playlist and plays you music that is like the song or artist you selected. You can give a "thumbs up" or a "thumbs down" on each song as it plays to refine the database's criteria. You'll need a broadband connection and a nice set of speakers.

The third gift for you is the most magical and mystical and one that is within the reach of all of us. It is the chance to bask in the reflected glow of the gift that you have given to your students, the gift of music. You have been instrumental in offering them an opportunity to collaboratively create a sculpture in the air that affects everyone who hears it. Take the time to recharge your batteries. Whether it is by travelling to new places and experiencing new cultures and ideas or by snuggling into the comfort of your own home surrounded by those you love and those who love you, take the time to refresh and renew your creative essence.

Enjoy all of the magic of your holiday season.

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