

Online Resources: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

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Many teachers now-a-days are online and are finding, sharing, and utilizing materials sourced from the worldwide web. The internet is a great resource and has enabled teaching and learning to advance in ways that our predecessors could only have dreamed about. However, with new capabilities also comes new pitfalls and dangers to avoid. Here's some of the good, the bad, and the ugly of online resources in music education.

The Good

- Online communities such as the [Great Plains Orff Chapter Facebook page](#), [Nebraska Music Teaches](#), [The American Orff-Schulwerk Association Discussion Group](#), [Elementary Music Teachers](#) and other Facebook communities create one stop shopping for finding new colleagues to connect with, seek advice from, and share resources with. Not only are there lots of voices to contribute to a question, it's easy to find local events and trainings that area teachers are attending.
- [TeachersPayTeachers.com](#) is one example of an online marketplace where Teachers can post their educational materials for other Teachers to browse and purchase. It's not only just visuals and manipulatives; you can buy bulletin boards, themed packages, entire lesson plans, and planning materials. I use a custom, yearlong planner for Music teachers I found on TpT and had it printed and bound through my district's Print Shop.
- Blogs such as [Beth's Notes](#), Pinterest Boards, and Podcasts such as [Make Moments Matter](#) and [Music Teacher Coffee Talk](#) allow us to connect with individual teachers who are keeping track of their successes and growth points in a less commercial environment.
- [AOSA's Video Library](#), NAFME's video-based [NAFME Academy](#), and YouTube provide all sorts of different videos of activities, lessons, presenters, and performances of an incredibly wide variety. I frequently will watch a folk dance on YouTube for reference before teaching it to students, and sometimes will even show it to them so that they have a clear concept of the movements.
- Apple Music, Spotify, and other streaming services not only have classical, pop, rock, and all other kinds of listening examples. They also have the Amidons, New England Dance Masters, recordings of the Volumes, and rare and out-of-print titles such as Musica Poetica.

The Bad

- Streaming services don't come with the print resources they're associated with. So although you may have the folksong or Amidon track you were hoping to use, you don't get the dance instructions to go with them. Furthermore, the revenue that supports these educators from streaming is substantially lower than that of book and CD sales.
- YouTube frequently removes copyrighted content that is illegally posted to its servers, which can mean that content you'd been teaching with will suddenly be removed. AutoPlay has also been known to cause teacher headaches, as it will start playing the next video that YouTube's algorithms think you want to see. This can be avoided with diligence or by using a service such as My VR Spot as a sort of "container" for YouTube videos to exist in; your district may or may not provide these resources to you.
- Showing videos of musicians performing can be valuable, but *absolutely* cannot replace active music making. Students must be making music themselves, but they also need a competent music teacher to model musicianship and to make live music for them.
- There is no substitute for a well-planned lesson. Although it can be tempting to "phone it in" and use purchased resources from online, just because the presentation is cute doesn't mean that it is

thorough, accurate, or the best materials to use with children. It's still important to look through all lessons first and ensure that they are really the best tools to teach your students with.

- Remember that creativity is a core value of Orff-Schulwerk; this is true for teachers as well as for students. Working with the volumes and creating our own materials are part of what make us Orff practitioners. It's important to write your own stuff, too.

The Ugly

- Selling your custom, home-made teaching materials may seem like a quick way to make extra money online, but be careful about your district's policy on that. Many districts, such as Lincoln Public Schools, frown on teachers selling their materials online. The policy states that district resources are to be used exclusively for the benefit of district students. That is, it's against district policy for me to make "my own" materials using my district-provided laptop computer or to do so during my plan time. There are examples of teachers being disciplined and even terminated for this, so it's wise to be careful.
- Digital and online resources often require an internet connection and display capabilities. Technical trouble can create opportunities for unfortunate classroom management situations. Whenever using any sort of digital resource, make sure to have a backup plan for some – or even all – of the lesson. I'm a computer science teacher for one day out of the week, and even I still have issues with connectivity and fussy tech.
- Lagging, buffering, and low quality audio/video can have a detrimental effect to the enjoyment of music; If an audio example won't load properly, it's better to skip it entirely. Otherwise, students will hear only snippets between moments of frustration. If it can't be shown properly, don't show it at all.
- When using a projector, ALWAYS HARD WIRE IT IF POSSIBLE. I cannot stress this enough. It may be convenient to stream to an Apple TV instead of fussing with cables and having the right dongle, but it isn't worth it. It *will* lag, it *will* slow down your WiFi, and if there's enough teachers in the building streaming to Apple TVs, there *will* be connectivity issues. It doesn't matter if I'm teaching Music, Computer Science, or leading a staff meeting; I **always** hard wire.
- We all know the professional danger to us as teachers that social media can cause, but even district policy-compliant social media presences can have unforeseen consequences. Some students have strict custody arrangements that protect them from unstable or dangerous parents; I've had students who had to attend school in what amounts to secrecy, to protect their location from an abusive parent. If I were to have posted a picture of my Chorus on an official school Instagram and that parent were to have seen it, this student would have had to transfer schools immediately. Be cautious about posting videos or pictures of classes or concerts in any capacity; digital trails are impossible to delete.

All in all, the internet provides a wealth of awesome resources that enhance teaching and learning. I use materials found, stored, and shared online every day in my Music Room. However, like all things, there's a healthy amount of caution that is necessary to be a web-literate teacher. It's important to know the guidelines of your building and district, and to double check the quality and authenticity of any resource used to present to children. It's also critical to remember opportunity costs and to make sure that what you're using precious contact time on is of the highest quality.

If you have any questions or are seeking suggestions of places to look for awesome online Music Education resources, you can email me at mfoley@lps.org during the school year, or mikefoley2@icloud.com.