

POWER AND SOUND

A museum and music technology centre work together to create educational outcomes.

PETER MAHONY, of SoundHouse at the Powerhouse, tells how.

Most Australians know Sydney's Powerhouse Museum. It houses a collection of world-class importance, situated in an old industrial building recycled for new life as a museum. The origins of the building have in part informed the basis and direction of the museum, as a centre focusing on science and design. It therefore seemed appropriate to include a music technology centre, called the SoundHouse at Powerhouse, within the museum. The opportunities arising from this collaboration are as varied as imagination allows-particularly for schools.

Given the museum's focus on significant pieces that stimulate, engage and create a cohesive story, there are many opportunities for schools to use a visit to the museum and SoundHouse to develop creative responses across the curriculum. Integrating music and media responses with the more science- focused aspects of a visit enables creative processes and outcomes not readily available in the classroom. Both the museum and the SoundHouse use the processes of invention in their educational experiences. Students are encouraged to try; make mistakes and retry-all three stages being analogous to the creative process.

Enlarging students' understanding of the world, including the cyberworld, is an important element of today's curriculum. One of the ways in which the Powerhouse/SoundHouse nexus can assist teachers is by enabling students to look at the world presented in specific exhibitions. These provide opportunities for discourse, for reinforcing and challenging. The relationship between literacy and media is well understood by educators. Developing literacy in the context of the world presented by an exhibition might include development of awareness and extension of literacy through use of new media technologies. For example, the visit might include the creation of a music video related to some aspect of the exhibition.

With music as a starting point, cultural aspects of exhibition content may be introduced. For example, for a visit to an exhibition of Korean ceramic treasures, digitally sampled traditional instruments (gongs, drums) and scales are introduced, then are available to be 'blended' by students with other musical resources including contemporary popular modes such as hip-hop, drums and bass lines. The sounds are selected and arranged within a multi-track sequencing program.

The completed musical 'mix' then becomes the structural starting point for a video editing project also offering a selection of image resources, including traditional decorative art motifs and images of urban Korean life, and the final project a 'discussion' of culture, art, and history.

Many of these processes would not be available in the school situation, so the opportunity to be actively engaged in a process that provides knowledge and understanding, and results in outcomes such as improved listening, can only enhance teachers' classroom work. Exploring such concepts as the interplay of sound and image as in music videos, and video techniques such as velocity enveloping to slow, speed, stop and reverse motion, provides motivation by activating a connection between prior knowledge and experience-popular culture-and personal expression.

All of this is fun, engaging and more importantly, taps into the creativity and self-confidence of students as they progress through these experiences.

A recent major temporary exhibition was called 'Sport: more than heroes and legends'. Linking music to sport opened the possibility for use of sound, editing and control in varying and unique ways. Music is a key element in the promotion of sport. The energy of music is a signifier for the passion displayed by athlete and fan alike. The SoundHouse program combined extreme sports video imagery, such as snowboarding and animated text slides, with contemporary music sounds to create a motion graphic sequence.

Having experienced music technology within the museum context during a Powerhouse visit is not the end of the story. Students can access the multimedia possibilities long after they return to their classrooms-or, in the case of those who cannot get to Sydney-via cyberspace. The on-line tuition and sharing possibilities offered at <http://www.soundbyte.org.au/>, allow ready access to all who wish to develop or just dip into creative music experiences.

Further information:

Powerhouse

<http://www.pbm.gov.au/>

For readers in WA, a similar experience is possible at Scitech, the museum and sound technology centre located in Perth.

See <http://www.scitech.org.au/for> further information.