

The Director's Story: iPads in the Directing Class

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Abstract

iPad technology emerged in the Spring of 2010. A tablet mobile technology, the iPad has generated considerable interest in higher education for teaching and learning. Any technology should be incorporated in teaching and learning because of its suitability to the learning event and context. Research on the use of iPads is needed to determine the success factors, potential pitfalls, and benefits. Students and instructor in a fourth year English directing class used iPads for course-related activities for one semester. Results of this case study's video interview with the instructor, and co-investigator, are presented in this poster. The instructor, Yorick, discusses the benefits of the iPad and apps chosen, challenges encountered and how these were dealt with, and provides recommendations for others preparing to implement iPad technology in their networked learning course in higher education. The iPad increased communication, through sharing and collaboration, it was concise, portable, and made resources affordable and more accessible. Three terms are attributed to the iPad: organization, efficiency, and enthusiasm.

Keywords

iPad, tablets, networked learning

Research Context

During the winter 2011 semester a fourth year English directing course participated in an iPad research project. Participants used university-furnished iPads, including e-texts and directing related apps relevant to the course. Students were encouraged to use the iPad for their other course work and personal use as well during the semester. Four members of the university community, including the instructor, formulated the research team who looked at the impact of iPads (a networked technology) on learning in this exploratory case study.

The iPad is a mobile learning technology. Laurillard (2007) defines mobile learning as "the digital support of adaptive, investigative, communicative, collaborative, and productive learning activities in remote locations" (p. 172). Cochrane (2010) notes that it's "the potential for mobile learning to bridge pedagogically designed learning contexts, facilitate learner-generated contexts, and content [...], while providing personalisation and ubiquitous social connectedness, that sets it apart from more traditional learning environments" (p. 134). The iPad is suitable for learning which is situated and collaborative.

Aims and Objectives

The project sought to understand both learners' and instructor's experience of iPad use in the class. Five primary aims were identified: (a) how iPads can be integrated in a class as an educational tool; (b) iPad effectiveness in teaching and learning; (c) extent of iPads in supporting learner interactivity, collaboration, communication, reflection, interest, engagement, and motivation; (d) whether iPads can enhance student learning; and (e) what its role is as a disruptive technology. To this end, learners were surveyed and video interviewed at the beginning and end of the course and the instructor was video interviewed post-course.

Results

Results of an instructor interview inform this poster presentation. Interview data underwent content analysis in relation to the research aims.

Integration in a class as an educational tool - Yorick took time to carefully select apps for this course. The most useful, versatile app was celtx. The other apps chosen were great, handy or useful. These included the iPad mail app, Dropbox, Kindle, Clapboard, cinemek, Final Cut Pro, and IMDB. Overall, he thought the iPad was great! Yorick reflected that the iPad was about style and aesthetic, whereas some apps were not! Everyone was

comfortable with the iPad at end of course. Yorick was reassured that while some students struggled with the iPad, their outlook was still very positive. He noted that one student was "very positive it was hard to learn to use!". Yorick offered advice for future adaptations: explore apps in depth and if not user friendly, find an alternate; cover how to use the apps in class; focus on the iPad as a tool to support class activities not a class on using the iPad; and use the iPad and apps whenever possible to model expected behaviours and attitudes.

Effectiveness in teaching and learning - Yorick found the iPad to be a "really very soft and non-obtrusive device" that positively impacted learning. Yorick noted that learners read more than if using physical books; as class notes and books were more accessible. Its versatility was emphasized by learners; they could keep up on things anytime, anywhere. The iPad was truly mobile. Students were always prepared, had their books and notes with them. Students read "a lot more than they would have otherwise...the iPad makes their notes and books so accessible". The iPad was incredibly easy to use, very intuitive. There were some initial concerns with using the iPad, relating to the apps chosen, which were addressed over the course of the semester. For example, the Wordpress app was not very user-friendly. The blog authenticity was missing because of the lack of WYSIWYG design. Kindle's initial issue with pagination was resolved with updates over the semester.

Support of learner interactivity, collaboration, communication, reflection, interest, engagement, and motivation - It was easy for students to collaborate on scripts with each other and the instructor. Yorick reflected that, at the beginning, he didn't realize how useful the iPad would be for sharing information with the class through the drop box and communicating through email. The iPad helped keep students engaged. Students spent the first two-thirds of the semester blogging amongst the class. Yorick noted that in the students' reflections they said they were using the iPad productively in class to look up things the instructors were saying during class. Yorick did not believe the iPad was responsible for increasing interest in the subject matter but rather that it was up to the instructor to maintain whatever interest the students had in the class by being dynamic and connecting with them. It is important to pay attention to students' concerns about the issues they were experiencing with the apps. Students were motivated to learn, seeking solutions to the blogging app issues (switching to web interface) or pitching in with students' projects to get storyboarding completed on time for filming.

Enhancement of student learning - Yorick, in incorporating iPads in the classroom, successfully integrated Cochrane's (2010) critical success factors for mobile learning initiatives. There was a suitable level of integration of iPad into course criteria and assessment. He modelled pedagogical uses of iPad. There was regular formative feedback from instructor and fellow students on assignments. The apps chosen were appropriate for the course. Technology- and pedagogy-based support was provided.

A disruptive technology - The energy and enthusiasm generated in the class when students learned they were to have iPads for the semester was sustained throughout the semester. The novelty of the iPad quickly abated as the semester unfolded and students and instructor continued to increase their comfort with the new technology and its apps.

Summary

The iPad project illuminates success factors associated with mobile learning. The iPad increased communications, through sharing and collaboration, it was concise (everything in one little device), portable (easy to carry), made texts affordable, and resources more accessible. Three terms could be attributed to the iPad: organization, efficiency, and enthusiasm. For the instructor, Yorick, the project afforded sharing knowledge of mobile technologies and apps while researching participants' experience of this. While the iPad was well received by all participants, some issues were noted. Further exploration of its use in other disciplines would inform the depth of its use as a teaching and learning tool. Reviewing a course's learning design and careful review of apps to determine ways to integrate in class activities would help promote its use in class for activities beyond note taking or web searches. The iPad use in this course went a long way towards outlining strategies for successful implementation.

References

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