IPads in Schools – pros and cons

Ipads – NO … Why the iPad is bad for education

'Amazing, revolutionary, a new era in technology'. The iPad may be all these things but in my humble opinion it is bad for education and schools. Here are some reasons.

They aren't popular.

The iPad isn't designed to be a primary home computer. Not even a secondary device. Ask any student, do you want a cell phone? Of course they do. So, at best, an iPad is a tertiary technology purchase and won't have the ubiquity education needed to begin meaningful integration. The classes will be split between the have and the have not students. iPads promote social division between students who we are encouraging to work cooperatively in our classes.

They are only designed to be a one user device.

The reason that most schools still have computer labs with desktop computers is multifold. They always have power and have good connectivity as they are wired to the network and internet. They are also great for having multiple students use them in a given day. This doesn't work for the iPad. Take for example the email app which is designed for one user to check and send messages.

Back to my previous point. Apple has designed a one user machine for the simple reason that the less it can be shared the more they sell. Even at the 'cheap' price of $499 that would be a whopping $400,000 to get them for all the students at our school.

They promote media consumption not creation

The small keyboard is difficult and slow to type on. Voice dictation accuracy is average to poor. Our ESL and special need students who most need voice input, it would be terrible. Therefore, writing, blogging and having students create projects would be a worse experience than regular laptops/desktops.

Purchasing Apps is for individuals not schools

There isn't clear information on how schools can get discounts for bulk purchase of apps. [Check out the terms of use on the apple site](#). Let's say your class has a mix of school owned and personal iPads. If you had 'an awesome' paid app, how would you get it on all iPads?

They don't support flash

Really Apple? I've read [Steve Job's open letter to Adobe](#) and still don't get it. There are so many great free educational sites that are built on flash. One of my favorite websites for having students practice keyboarding flash based [Dance Mat Typing](#). Why can't I use this site on my iPad?

They are fragile

Take this as an example. Let's say your school uses eBooks on the iPad. Now the simple statement of 'open your book and turn to page 123' is now a lesson in patience as the device loads, student find the app and opens the textbook. If the book is WiFi dependent there is another challenge to overcome. When the battery runs out there isn't only no iPad, there is no textbook.

Links

I'm not the only person who feels this way. Here are some other posts to support this view

[Why iPads can't succeed in education](#) by Liam Cassidy

[Why the iPad Will Not Reform Higher Education Anytime Soon](#) by Lindsay Pund

OK, I know that this post is intentionally controversial and against common views of educators that own one (including myself). Please feel free to agree or disagree.

iPads – YES … HISTORY 2.0 - Why Go 1:1 iPad?

In a response to a well written and thoughtful post that I recently read "[Why the iPad is bad for education](#)", I felt compelled to respond from my personal experience of rolling out a cart of 30 iPads in a shared high school environment.

Fundamentally I believe that an iPad can neither be good or bad. All it can ever be is an iPad. I argue instead, that when used effectively and with specific goals in mind, iPads can have a positive impact on education. Seeing that schools are investing money on these devices, the perspective to adopt is not a combative one, but rather one that explores how to effectively integrate the devices. Whether a school is 1:1, or there is a shared iPad cart, the devices can be used effectively.

Time & Space:
iPad features related to time and space are incredibly important. Booting up a laptop and logging into a school network can take upwards of 3 minutes. The iPad is instant & the amount of time lost preparing the device for use is minimal. You can use the iPad for 10 minutes in class, slide it under your chair for a discussion and pull it back out to complete an assessment on Socrative. You can fit a book or piece of paper and an iPad on a desk, allowing students to combine the best of both worlds. The iPad doesn't block your view of someone's face, they can be used in discussion circles and they pose no distraction. Considering time constraints and battery life, if you plug them in the night before, they will last all day. As [Justin Reich](#), my colleague at [EdTechTeacher](#) put it, "These things may seem trivial, but teaching is in many ways a battle against time, and tablets allow much more seamless transition between tech-on and tech-off activities."

The iPad is Not a Computer...
In my humble opinion, the reason why iPads have caught on is because while an iPad is not a computer, it offers enough of the computing feel to make them viable in classrooms. Yes, the keyboard is virtual,

but it doesn't take long to get used to typing in either the traditional or text message style keyboard.

The device shouldn't be looked at as a computer, because it isn't...it is more than that. It is a:

- Mobile recording device (audio & video)
- Editing device (audio, video, images & text)
- Publishing platform (blogs, websites, video, audio and screencasts to YouTube)
- Digital Notebook
- Digital Research Platform

I have read the arguments that suggest the iPad is a consumption based, single user device and I no longer find the argument valid. With a shared iPad cart my students have:

- Published screencasts to YouTube (Explain Everything)
- Recorded, edited & published podcasts to SoundCloud (Garageband)
- Recorded, edited & published video to YouTube & Vimeo (iMovie)
- Published blog posts (Posterous via email)
- Bookmarked research material to a collaborative Diigo Group (Diigo Bookmarklet)
- Written papers (Pages)
- Exported documents to cloud storage accounts (Dropbox & SendtoDropbox)

Take all of the above and throw it together into a device that doesn't need a manual and can be figured out by nearly any student in a matter of minutes and it clearly becomes a viable device for 1:1 schools. While consumption may be the primary and initial function of the iPad, with a growing list of apps that allow for content creation that can be published to the web, the consumption argument falls short.

One User Devices:
In an ideal world, iPads in schools would not be shared between students. A number of problems arise when these devices are shared. iMovie projects, GarageBand recordings, and papers written in Pages can be deleted by another student before they are finished. I can only speak to my experience, but I have yet to have students lose any work due to it being deleted by another user.   Education, trust and training on proper use of these shared devices is the key.   When I work with classes using the shared iPad cart, one of the first points I make is that these are shared devices and the way we use them responsibly is to not open, delete or share any work that isn't yours.

To expand on this point, shared iPads can introduce students to the concept of cloud storage. In working with a few classes I have seen how quickly students can adapt to the concept of working locally on an iPad while writing a paper in Pages, exporting the document to their cloud storage account (we have used Dropbox & SendtoDropbox to export via email), updating the document at home and then finally pulling the document down from the cloud to work locally again on any iPad from the cart. Research can also become cloud based and collaborative. In the movie trailer below (created on an iPad in @katrinakennett's English class conducting Paperless iPad Research Papers), students are conducting research and bookmarking their findings and notes to a collaborative Diigo group. The process of group research, tagging and collaboration are all fostered because of the use of shared iPads.

All in One:
Is everything easy to do on an iPad? Absolutely not. The device takes getting used to and all apps are not equal in terms of functionality and ease of use. However, watching students quickly switch between research, writing, social bookmarking, listening to podcasts, watching videos and then returning to their writing is impressive.   Yet writing isn't the only type of content that can be produced. Watching students work in small groups huddled around an iPad as they record and edit their radio show, or watching them take to the hallway during class to shoot scenes of their movie, or watching individual students create collage like images that are then pulled into a screen casting app where they can verbally explain and justify their creation allows one to quickly realize that all of this simply could not be done this intuitively on a computer. The screencast below was created by one of my students in a Sports in American Society class. She created a collage using Visualize and then exported the image to ExplainEverything to narrate, explain and justify her choices.

The iPad will not save education. The iPad is neither good or bad, it is and only ever will be an iPad. It doesn't deserve a pedestal and will never take the place of fulfilling classroom discussion and human interaction. Yet, there is a place for this device in our schools.