Adventures With iPads

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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There are many schools and school divisions already working with iPads in the classroom. This article might not seem cutting edge to those already there, but I'm piloting the use of iPads in my classroom for my school division. When I was researching how I was going to pull this off, there was a plethora of information regarding types of apps, carts to use, ideas of ways I could use the apps, but not a lot of information about how to get started. I really wanted to know how to create an engaging learning environment where we could all use these devices successfully and as seamlessly as possible. As if it were just another tool – like a pencil or a piece of paper! This article is for the beginner – like me, who wished I had one good place to start. Or for the veteran, who might just find a good idea (or so I hope!)

I didn't receive my set of iPads until after Christmas break. We have a set of 15 student iPads, and one teacher iPad, which means the students have to share. Having a half class set of iPads resulted in an effective way to introduce the device in a collaborative environment but has also proven challenging to assess students on an individual basis since they are always sharing the devices.. The iPads came numbered, in Otter Box cases, and in a cart. Now what?!

Tips and Tricks:

1. Have them sign a [contract]. Have their parents sign it too. After looking up several online versions, I combined ideas for this one. It focuses on being responsible, respectful and safe while using the iPads. Each of them is assigned an iPad number, and that is the only one they use. That way, if there is ever an issue, I know which students are responsible for it. Having the parents sign keeps them in the loop as to what the expectations are.

2. Have a way to manage instruction time vs user time. I use a [traffic light] sign I found online (created by a student for the Frisco Independent School District for BYOD). It works amazingly well. I made a big red arrow and placed magnetic tape on the back. When the arrow is at red, the students are not to touch the iPad. When it is at yellow, the iPad is face down and away from them on their desk/table. When it is green, they can use the iPad. Any time I need to stop and give instruction I move the arrow. If I forget to move it – they remind me!

3. When making the decision as to what apps you would like on it, treat it like another tool. As part of my assessment plan, I chose apps that the students needed based upon student engagement and product delivery. In other words, I selected apps that

supported the curriculum outcomes of the task or assignment be given to the students. I avoided games and focused upon apps that gave direction and enrichment. As my focus was on Grade 6 Social Studies, I put on research apps (Google Search, Maps, Earth) and concept mapping (Popplet), documenting apps (Evernote), a QR code reader (scan) to make going to websites and documents easier. Use exit tickets? Try the Socrative app. I use Glogster in my classes to create online posters and they just came out with an app, so of course I made sure that was on. There are so many great places to look for app ideas! The AASL (American Association of School Librarians) puts out a "Best Apps for Teaching and Learning" every year. It's a great place to start. iTunes has recommendations for educational recommended apps, Pinterest, our Technology Coordinator – Karen Loch created a Symbaloo called Noteworthy Apps. The list is endless!

4. Don't be afraid to try new things and let your students teach you a thing or two! So many uses and new ideas have come from their questions and explorations. Allowing my students to select how they want to share their information means that they are far more engaged and creative with their projects. If you are needing a brush up on some new tools, look no further than the Digital Badges on the SSLA website (also another article in this edition of The Medium). Many of the apps I mentioned above are badges you can receive through the SSLA Digital Badging project.

I'm excited to continue with this pilot, with the hope that next year we may have a full class set. I think that teachers and administrators were hesitant to go this route due to the expense of it all. I have heard a few times "What happens if you break one?" I'm happy to report, they are all safe and sound, ready to keep my students engaged, on task, inquiring, learning, and best of all excited to be in class – which is amazing for a middle years classroom!