

Snapshot Study 6

The school and its vision for digital technology

SS6 was an independent K-12 school with a religious ethos. The school's vision was about achieving excellence at any point in time, and building a community of learners that included parents, staff and students. Digital technology was viewed as being important for learning in the 21st century - its use should become as invisible as the use of a pen or pencil has today.

The digital technology strategy

From a proposal by the school ICT coordinator in 2010, a research process was initiated and staff provided with iPads in August 2011. In January 2012, all Year 9 to Year 11 students were issued a school-owned, government-funded iPad, which they could take home and could add their own resources to. All Years 5 to 8 students were required to purchase an iPad for classroom use from January 2012.

Wireless networking was available throughout the school, which provided students with filtered access to the Internet.

An example activity

Yr7 Japanese – Vocabulary and comprehension

The children were sat in rows facing the front of the class. Each child had a workbook (photocopied sheets) and an iPad. The first task was to use an app called Quizlet¹ to create vocabulary cards, which had a word or phrase in English on one side and Japanese on the other. These could then be used like flashcards or to play matching games. The teacher demonstrated how to use the software on her iPad, connected to the data projector via Apple TV. The children then created their own sets of vocabulary cards on their iPads, using vocabulary from their workbooks.



Then the teacher introduced the next task, which was to use an app called Tellagami² to record some sentences in Japanese, which an animated avatar would repeat back. Having recorded their sentences the students were going to email their Tellagami file to five other students, who would translate the sentences and write the answers in their workbooks. The teacher demonstrated how to use Tellagami, using her iPad and data projector. The students then worked on their sentences and audio recordings, some going out of the classroom to find quieter places to record themselves speaking their sentences.

¹ Quizlett <http://quizlet.com/mobile>

² Tellagami <https://telligami.com/>

Impact

- Whilst the basic structure of lessons had not changed there was much greater variety in the activities that students undertook as a result of having the iPads.
- The ability to easily share files by email had increased peer-peer collaboration in some classes, as in the example above where peers acted as authentic audiences for each others' work.
- Some teachers were concerned about students being distracted as a result of having access to the iPads, though others felt that the level of off-task activity was similar before the 1:1 iPad strategy was implemented. A key difference, that some noted, was that off-task behaviour was less disruptive of the whole class than it had been before the iPads were introduced.
- The use of email had increased the speed of communication with parents, which was not always a positive!

Key lesson learnt

- Moving towards 1:1 is inevitable.
- You need to increase your wireless network capacity to cope with increased demand.
- Get buy-in from stakeholders, including parents who need support in knowing how to manage their children's use of the devices at home.
- Whilst it was daunting at first (for teachers) there are so many 'easy, creative and amazing things out there' that can be implemented quickly. However, it takes time (years) to bring about more fundamental pedagogic change.

An emerging trend – What device

The school had concluded that going 1:1 was unavoidable in the long run. They conducted extensive research between September 2010 and June 2011 to inform their 1:1 strategy. This led them to the conclusion that iPads were the most suitable device because they were 'always on', had a long battery life, were 'half the price of laptops', and did much of what they needed educationally. In order to reduce the cost for parents who might have more than one child in the school the 1:1 initiative involved government funded devices for Years 9 to 12 and parentally funded ones for Years 5 to 8.

Over 2012 and 2013, as the school evaluated the 1:1 strategy and considered extending the programme to the younger year groups, they started to review their focus on 1:1 iPads. Whilst the younger children preferred to use iPads rather than laptops, there was more resistance to iPads in the senior years. This reflected the greater complexity of the work that the older students needed to do and raised questions about whether iPads were the best device across the whole school. In practice the older students had already started bringing in laptops as well as their iPads. So the school had moved to a Many:1 model in Years 10 to 12, in which students used the iPad as a companion device, but could also brought in other devices such as laptops.

This fits with the 'What device' dimension that has emerged from a range of other studies:

What device	Desktop	Laptop	Tablet	Tablet +
Category	Explanation			
Desktop	Desktop machines			
Laptop	Laptops, netbooks, Tablet PCs			
Tablet	Tablets and other devices with a touch screen (but without a physical keyboard)			
Tablet +	Recognition that no one device is suitable for all tasks and students therefore need to have access to different devices for different activities.			