

iPads for Kindergartners

Difficulty:

AVERAGE

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Discussion activities to be done after completing this EA lesson

Today's report is about a project which is using iPads in schools. Why, where, and how, are they being used? What do the children think about using them? What are the long-term plans for iPads?

Extension discussion topics

A. Talking about and going over the specific topic / idea / issue in listening text

Introduction = Where and how are iPads being used? What is the iPad project about? Why are they being used? What are the plans for using iPads in the future?

1. What did we learn about where and how are iPads being used?

- The report was from Sherwood Heights Elementary School in Auburn, Main, U.S.
- It was from a kindergarten class with 5 and 6 year olds.
- The teacher uses iPad applications.
- They are used for letter recognition and formation - word work.
- For feedback to the children.
- To help with dealing with many children in a class.
- To help the teacher come up with individualized learning plans for each student.
- The kids like using them.

Would you have liked to have used iPads when you were at school? Why, why not?

2. What is the iPad project about?

- To see if they help children learn.
- To provide comparative data on the impact of students' use of the iPads.
- The project has cost two hundred thousand dollars which has come from state and federal grants.
- To see if they can help address the huge deficiency in two key areas, children's literacy and math.
- Because only sixty to sixty-five percent of third grade students are at benchmark levels.

Do you think the project will eventually show improvements in learning? Why, or why not?

3. What is the future of the iPad project?

- To look at the comparative data on the impact of students' use of the iPads.
- This will be available at the end of the school year.
- School districts in South Carolina, Tennessee, Illinois and other places are adopting similar strategies.
- To see if more iPads need to be bought and budgeted for.
- Some think that the iPads will cost too much.

Are there similar projects in your country?

B. Expanding on (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Computer applications.

1. Computer applications, programs or apps, were being used on the iPad with the children. Which computer programs do you use most? What do you use them for? How do they make your life easier? What is the worst computer program you have tried to use? What are the top five uses you make of your computer? Do you have an iPad? If not, would you like one? Why, why not? How are they different to PCs? What are their advantages and disadvantages?
2. iPhones and smartphones also use apps. Do you have one of these phones? If not, which one would you like? How would, or does, this phone help your life? Do many people in your country have smartphones? How are they better than the older mobile phones? Do you use it to surf the net? Do you use barcode scanners? Do you use your social networking sites on it?
3. What do you think are the most used apps for smartphones? Make a list of what you think the top 5 apps are used for and compare it to a friend's list. Then check here to see what the most popular apps are - <http://www.businessinsider.com/most-popular-android-apps-2011-9#> What apps have you got on your phone? Which do you use the most? Compare your most used apps with a friend's.
4. Imagine a new app for a smartphone, one that does not exist. What would you like it to do? How would it help you? What would it be called? Would it be popular with many people? Why doesn't it exist already?
5. How do you think computers are changing our lives? Have they changed your life? If so, in what way? What things do they make easier for you? What negative changes are they making upon the way we live? What changes do you think they will have in the future as computers become able to do more things? Do you think people will have to learn to write and read in the future, or will they just speak? Are they making us more isolated? How are they changing children's lives?

C. Extending discussion of (one of) the topics / ideas / issues in listening text

Topic = Education.

1. What was your early education like? When did you start your schooling? What was your first school and first teacher like? Was it near where you lived? What did you learn? Who were your best friends at school? Do you have any specific memories about it? Was it fun? Did you use any technology, if so what and what for?
2. Girls perform better in school than boys in the U.S.
(see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Achievement_gap_in_the_United_States)
Why do you think this is? Is this the same in your country? Is it a problem? Was this the same in your school? What do you think could be done to change this? What will be the results for society if this continues?
3. What do you think about single-sex schools? Did you go to one? If not, would you have liked to go a single-sex school? Are they popular in your country? What might be the advantages and disadvantages of these? Do they improve achievement?
(see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Single-sex_education#Effects_of_single-sex_education)
Are there other advantages or disadvantages of single-sex schools apart from academic results?
4. Apart from English Addicts, have you used any other technology for learning something? What was it, and what did you use it for? How effective was it? Was this in school or a personal use? How much use do you think schools should make of computers? Are there disadvantages of relying on computers to help learning?

Audioscript

At Sherwood Heights Elementary School in Auburn, Maine Laurie Gerard prepares her class for a session on the iPads. Before they collect their tablet-style, hand-held computers, the five and six year olds recite a ditty reviewing the ground rules for using them.

"Fingers on the bottom, thumbs on the top, that way my iPad won't drop."

"I was introducing our magnetic land application for the kids. We'll be using it for them to make names, words, when we're doing word work. And today they're just exploring so they get a feel for the application before we really get into it."

As the school year progresses, Gerard plans to use various iPad applications to help her come up with individualized learning plans for each student. The iPads have been a feature of her classroom since classes began in September, and they quickly became a big hit with many of the kids.

Sherwood Heights principal Laura Shaw says iPads also provide children with immediate feedback.

"When you have eighteen kids in the classroom and you see ten kids, hands raised up, the teacher does her best to get around. But sometimes, with the iPad and certain apps, the kids get immediate feedback. They know what they've done is correct and they can move on, or they know 'Oh, I need to ask for help'."

Nearly three hundred kindergartners in Auburn are taking part in the program this year. Half of them, like Miss Gerard's class, have already started; the other half will begin this month.

School officials say this is being done to provide comparative data on the impact of students' use of the iPads.

Project coordinator Mike Muir believes the computers can help address what he describes as a huge deficiency the district is facing in two key areas, literacy and math, where only sixty to sixty-five percent of third grade students are at benchmark levels. He says the recent experience of a colleague helps strengthen this belief.

"One of our literacy interventionists was working with several of her students, and having a hard time with helping them be successful. She finally pulled out her own personal iPad and had them work on some apps for letter recognition and letter formation. And they met the benchmark very quickly and, even as she moved on to other topics with these students, they retained that level of mastery."

Most of the initial funding for the two hundred thousand dollar project comes from state and federal grants, but Muir says he hopes the success of the initiative will make iPads a regular item in the school district's budget.

But not everyone is a fan of the Auburn iPad initiative.

"It's ridiculous. And it's ridiculous, not because of the iPads, but because of the amount of money."

Elliot Soloway is a computer science professor at the University of Michigan who studies the interface between technology and education.

"Technology is really a wonderful, wonderful idea, but the problem is, is that the iPads won't scale. The iPads are not sustainable."

Soloway also has his doubts about how useful the iPads will actually prove to be when it comes to teaching five-year olds.

Nevertheless, the concept is taking hold in a number of states, with school districts in South Carolina, Tennessee, Illinois and other places adopting similar strategies.

As for the iPad's effectiveness as a learning tool, here in Maine more will be known at the end of the school year, when the comparative data is released.

For VOA News, I'm Tom Porter in Auburn, Maine.