Integrating iPods & iPads into the Classroom

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Introduction:

Over the past several years, we have seen the rise of two fascinating and useful technological devices. The first of these two devices that came out was the iPod, which made its debut in 2001. This device allowed people to download music so that the owner could listen to his or her favorite songs anywhere they wanted. As new versions of the iPod were created, the owners were able to do many more things than simply listen to music. By 2007 people were also able to search the internet, take pictures, and record themselves. The second of the two devices that came out was the iPad, which became available to the public in 2010. This new device was essentially a handheld portable computer. The iPad is fascinating because it has many of the same functions as a personal computer while at the same time being much smaller. Because they are so much smaller than a computer, iPads are much more useful to people who have to work away from their home or office as well as providing great potential for advancing education. Students would be able to carry iPads around and be able to use them and learn no matter where they are.

The focus of this essay is to show that schools should integrate iPods and iPads into the classroom because they will empower students and allow them to take control over their own education. Throughout this essay the ideas of leading advocates of integrating iPods and iPads into the classroom will be discussed to support the claim that these devices should be integrated in the classroom. These advocates are: Guernsey, 2013; Schwartz, 2013; Billings & Mathison, 2011. In an attempt to refute this claim, the ideas of leading critics of integrating iPods and iPads into the classroom will be addressed. The critics that will be discussed are: Richtel, 2010; Estes, 2011; Schwartz, 2014.
It is the belief of many educators that allowing students to use iPods and iPads to do their work will engage the students and make them want to work harder to complete their work (Guernsey, 2013; Schwartz 2013; Billings & Mathison, 2011). With the useful applications that are available on both devices, students will be able to find the solutions to the problems that they are stuck on. If students are stuck on a particular mathematics problem, they can use the internet to find a video that explains how to correctly complete a similar problem. This allows students to find a solution to their problem and complete their work right away rather than having to rely on their teacher to provide them with an explanation the next time that they have class. As students become more in charge of their own education, the role of the teacher will change as well. iPods and iPads will make the teacher become more of a facilitator and a guide to the information rather than the primary source that provides students with the information. Their job is to get kids excited about learning and give them the tools to be able to access the knowledge to be able to create, analyze, contrast, synthesize and design new things out of the learning by using the technology that is available to them.

On the other side of the argument, some critics feel that there is not enough benefit in using them to invest in an iPod or an iPad for each student in their school (Richtel, 2010; Estes, 2011; Schwartz, 2014). One of the main arguments that critics present is that these devices are much too expensive to be purchased for students who are too young to properly take care of them. Another main concern that critics have about implementing the use of iPods and iPads into the classroom is that they cause too much of a distraction to the students. Matt Richtel describes that “Students have always faced distractions and time-wasters. But computers and cellphones, and the constant stream of stimuli they offer, pose a profound new challenge to
focusing and learning” (2010). Critics believe that if students are allowed to work on iPods and iPads by themselves, they will be tempted to use them in ways that they are not supposed to.

Advocates of Technology in the Classroom:

One of the main arguments that advocates of implementing iPods and iPads into the classroom have is that they empower the students and allow them to take charge of their own education. One way that iPods and iPads allow students to take control over their own education is by giving them the ability to monitor their own progress and assess themselves in various content areas. Guernsey (2013) discusses how the students at Zurich International School in Switzerland use school issued iPads to monitor their own progress in order to increase their ability levels and understandings in various areas. Guernsey (2013) explains that this school has 600 iPads, which is one for every student in this kindergarten through eighth grade school. While she was doing her observation at this school she found that the reasons for their success are the lessons that teachers use and their unconventional take on what the iPod’s purpose is. At Zurich International School, they believe that tablets were intended to be used as video cameras, audio recorders, and multimedia notebooks of individual students’ creations, and they are not valued as mobile gaming devices or portable screens.

While at the Zurich International School, Guernsey had a conversation with second grade teacher Sam Ross. Mr. Ross stated that iPads are an amazing tool because they allow students to show you what is on their minds by adding oral explanation to their work. Instead of having to wait until the teacher is free to tell them their ideas, they can record their ideas on the iPad while it is fresh in their minds and show the teacher at a later time. Mr. Ross later stated that the most eye-opening thing to watch is the students watching videos of themselves
and explaining what they were thinking at the time. Looking back over their recordings and having to explain what their thinking was allowed the students to gain a better understanding of the information that they were sharing in the video because they had to analyze what they were saying and thinking at that time and be able to explain it to the teacher.

Project Tomorrow and Kajeet for Education (2013) also demonstrated that implementing the use of tablets into the classroom allows students to take control over their own learning experience. Project Tomorrow and Kajeet for Education provided all 136 fifth grade students at Falconer Elementary School in Chicago, Illinois and their four teachers with iPads that they were allowed to use both in the classroom as well as at their homes (Schwartz, 2013). The purpose of this study was to document how these students and teachers used the devices that they were given. The results of the study showed that two of the fifth grade teachers were much more comfortable with using and integrating the tablets into their classes because they used them for a wide range of activities and allowed their students to use their iPads during those activities. The results also showed that the other two fifth grade teachers were less comfortable with fully integrating the tablets into their classrooms because they did not encourage their students to use their iPads to aid them in their schoolwork. A majority of the students in these two classes used the tablets to play educational games and to check their grades whereas the students in the first two classes used them to: create videos, take class polls, take notes in class, play educational games, check their grades and to use the calendar.

The students in the first two classes were using them in ways that would help them expand their learning and would allow them to take control of their education. By taking notes during class they would be able to read through their notes at a later time so that they could try
to understand the material better. While the students were creating their videos they had to learn the material, critically think about how all of the components work together and come up with a way to display the information in a video. Once the videos were created, the students would be able to watch them at a later time in order to refresh that information in their minds. This would allow them to easily recall the information. Other students would also be able to watch these videos so that they could gain a better understanding of the information. This study also demonstrated that iPads empower students to take charge of their own education by showing how the tablets were used at the students’ homes. Three quarters of the iPads were used to access academic and educational websites between 3 pm and 9 pm. This means is that a majority of these fifth grade students took it upon themselves to use their tablets outside of school to access educational websites so that they could broaden their understanding of topics that they were interested in.

Billings and Mathison (2011) showed that by integrating the use of iPods into lessons and activities, students will be engaged in the material, excited to participate in the activities and choose to further their own understanding of the material because they are in control of their own education. In this study, Billings and Mathison (2011) had 240 fourth grade English Language Learning students from San Diego, California participate in various lessons and activities that were held at a local museum. The 240 students were split into two groups. One group watched an English only video with the entire class before each lesson that explained what they were going to be learning during that day’s lessons. After the day’s lessons the students in this group, along with their entire class, would watch another English only video
that would review the information they learned that day and reviewed the key vocabulary terms that the students needed to know.

The students in the other group were all given iPods, which contained the same videos that the students in the first group watched, but in addition they had Spanish versions of the videos. The students in this group were allowed to watch these videos by themselves on the bus rides to and from the museum. They could choose to watch only the Spanish videos, only the English videos or they could watch both versions. Unlike the first group, these students were allowed to re-watch any of the videos that they wanted so that they could gain a better understanding of any information that they didn’t understand after the first time of watching the videos. After all of the lessons and activities were completed, the students from both groups took a post-test to see how much they learned over the course of the unit and the results showed that the students in the second group performed much better than the students in the first group.

Billings and Mathison (2011) spoke with several of the students in the second group to find out how they liked using the iPods during the unit and they found that all of the students that they talked to really enjoyed being able to use them. Some of the students felt that the iPods allowed them to understand the material better because they were able to listen to the videos in both English and in Spanish. The students said that they would listen to the videos in English then listen to them in Spanish so that they could gain a better understanding of the vocabulary words. Some students said that they would listen to the English version again to reinforce the vocabulary and to gain a stronger grasp of the information. Billings and Mathison (2011) showed us that when given the opportunity, students will take it upon themselves to
learn the material. These students didn’t have to listen to the videos more than once, but they chose to listen to them several times so that they fully understood the material.

Critics of Technology in the Classroom:

Although there are many educators who believe that it would be beneficial to integrate iPods and iPads into the classroom because they would empower students and allow them to take control over their own education, there are others who feel that iPods and iPads in the classroom would cause more harm than good. One of the main reasons that critics feel that integrating the use of iPods and iPads into the classroom would cause more harm than good is that they believe students would become distracted and not be able to focus on their schoolwork. Richtel (2010) discusses how technology causes such a distraction to young people, and tells how this distraction jeopardized the future of a high school student in California.

Richtel (2010) begins by describing how the student only had to read one book over the course of the entire summer, but because Facebook, YouTube and creating digital videos, constantly distracted the student he only read 43 pages in two months. Although this student was entering his senior year of high school and was hoping that his grades would improve, he was unable to complete his one summer homework assignment because he was constantly distracted by technology. Richtel explains that “Researchers say the lure of these technologies, while it affects adults too, is particularly powerful for young people. The risk, they say, is that developing brains can become more easily habituated than adult brains to constantly switching tasks — and less able to sustain attention” (2010).

Richtel (2010) then goes on to discuss how this student began working harder on his school work and began getting the grade that he needed so that he could get into his college of
choice, but this only lasted a short while. Richtel (2010) explains that he began focusing more on a video that he was creating and less on his schoolwork. Even though this student knew how important it was for him to stay focused on his schoolwork, he was unable to resist the lure of technology. This directly relates to what some educators feel will happen if iPods and iPads are integrated into the classroom. Because they have so many functions, students will become unable to resist the temptations that these non-educational functions present and as a result the students will become distracted from their schoolwork.

Another reason that some educators believe that integrating the use of iPods and iPads into the classroom will be more harmful than beneficial is because they feel that these devices will negatively impact our students’ memories. Estes (2011) states that scientists have found that while multitasking our short-term memory deteriorates over time. In other words, as we get older, we have a harder time with distraction and the internet will only make it worse. If iPods and iPads are integrated and used on a regular basis in the classroom, the constant distractions that they cause will ruin the students’ short-term memory, which means they will have a harder time absorbing and retaining important information. Although iPods and iPads may empower students and allow them to have control over their education, the constant multitasking that they will be doing will restrict the amount of information that they will be able to retain. These devices may make students want to further their education and learn more about topics that interest them, but if they are losing their short-term memories, it will be harder for them to retain that new information.

Critics of integrating these devices into the classroom also feel that this is an inconceivable notion because it would be much too expensive for a school or a school district to
implement a program that would provide every student with an iPod or an iPad. Schwartz (2014) discusses three major expenses that would have to occur in order for a school or a school district to provide iPads to each student. The first thing that a school or a school district would have to do would be to upgrade the schools to a fast wireless internet connection and a broadband infrastructure. They would also have to keep that system running efficiently so that the students and teachers wouldn’t have problems while they are working. Keeping this system working efficiently would cost thousands of dollars. On top of all of these costs there is the cost of purchasing the devices for every student. An iPad costs around $600 dollars (Schwartz, 2014), which means that if a school had 300 students, it would cost $180,000 dollars to provide every student with an iPad. This is a lot of money for a school to raise in order to provide each of their students with an iPad.

Discussion:

There are some potential problems with integrating the use of iPods and iPads in the classroom. The initial cost of implementing a program that provides every student in the school with an iPod or an iPad would be expensive. The devices alone are a very hefty price to pay up front. Schools would also have to upgrade and maintain their internet systems so that they could handle the constant use by a large amount of students without encountering technical issues on a regular basis.

I do however disagree with the critic’s point that iPods and iPads would cause so much distraction for the students that they would not be able to focus on their schoolwork. If the teachers set clear expectations for how the students are supposed to behave while they are using the devices and if they enforce their expectations, the students will abide by the rules.
Also if the teacher is having the students participate in activities that they are interested in, they will engage in the work and not be tempted to use the devices in inappropriate ways. I also disagree with the argument that iPods and iPads are making people lose their short-term memory and that students will not be able to retain information if they participate in activities that use these devices on a regular basis. It’s not that people are losing their memories; it’s that many people today do not feel that it is worth their effort to memorize large amounts of facts because they can store these facts on their iPods or iPads and look them up when they need them. These devices are actually allowing people to think more critically because they are spending less time memorizing numerous amounts of information.

Integrating the use of iPods and iPads into the classroom would be worth the school’s money because they enable students to actively participate in their own education. Saylor (2013) states that the best learning is active and that tablets are made for active learning. The most effective way for students to fully comprehend and understand the material is to actively work with the information. The students need to have time to investigate the information so that they can become familiar with it and as a result, absorb the information. Tablets allow for this to happen. They allow students to investigate and play with information in a variety of ways. Students do learn through playing with the material and after they have played with and absorbed the information, it will become part of their understanding. They will be able to recall this information at a later time because they have a true understanding of it. Investigating the material in multiple ways allows the students to better understand the material; if one way doesn’t make perfect sense to them, they can try a different way that may make more sense to them. Tablets allow students to find the techniques that work best for them.
Tablets will also allow students to become active participants in their own education because they allow teachers to include their students in the process of selecting materials that they use in their classes. Reich and Holland (2013) discuss how teachers could allow their students to use their tablets to look for articles and videos on the topic that their teacher is teaching and use them in their class. This would get the students to invest in their education because they are being given the responsibility of determining which materials will be used in their class rather than being given the information by the teacher. I believe that this would be a great way to get the students excited about the unit and get them to actively participate in the activities because they will want to share the information that they found with the rest of the class.

**Conclusion:**

This essay shows that integrating iPods and iPads into the classroom will empower students and allow them to take control of their own education. If teachers had access to class sets of iPods of iPads, they would be able to create lessons that would make the students more responsible for learning the material. Rather than providing the students with the books or articles that contain the information that they need to know, the teacher could explain what they need to learn and provide them with access to several online resources that may have the information that they need. In my teaching experience I have found that the students have a greater sense of accomplishment when they find and learn the material on their own rather than when they are given the information. These types of assignments also set up the students to be successful in the future because when they get a job they may need to be able to locate information in order to successfully do their job. They will probably not be given the material
that they need, so by teaching the students these skills at a young age will put them on the right track to becoming a productive employee in the future.
References


