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A journey of realisation: iPads in learning

CHRIS BLUNDELL, ACADEMIC DEAN AT QUEENSLAND’S REDLANDS COLLEGE, WRITES ABOUT THE SCHOOL’S TRANSITION TO iPADS IN LEARNING AND HOW ITS TEACHERS UTILISE iPADS TO ENHANCE AND TRANSFORM TEACHING AND LEARNING.

Like other schools, Redlands College has long recognised the potential for Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) to significantly and broadly contribute to all facets of teaching and learning. Until recent innovations however, various limitations of technologies like desktop and laptop computers compromised this vision. We wanted ICTs that would be ubiquitous, highly flexible, and easy to use; what we had access to often demonstrated none of those attributes. With the release of iPads in 2010, things changed.

This article describes the nature of ICT provision at Redlands College and provides a brief overview of the College’s transition to our current arrangements, including our rationale for using iPads. It highlights examples of how our teachers utilise iPads to enhance and transform teaching and learning. Included, also, are observations about the nature of our journey. The article concludes with advice gleaned from our experience to this point in time.

IPAD PROGRAMME IN CONTEXT

Prior to initiating the iPad programme in 2011, our ICT provision model consisted of desktop computers in laboratories; accessing classrooms, which were standard teaching spaces with ten desktop computers around the sides of the room; and bookable sets of sixteen laptops in trolleys. Our aim was to make ICTs available for teaching and learning in as many places as possible. The limitations, however, were significant. Integrating ICTs in learning required considerable forward planning by teachers – equipment needed to be booked; room swaps organised; laptops collected and returned – leading to no small degree of frustration. This arrangement was inflexible and significantly limited opportunities for teachers to immediately respond to student needs. This frustration represented an important opportunity to innovate.

In 2011, we started our journey to a model focused on providing the right ICT, in the right places, at the right times. In this model, ICTs are available in two forms: core and specialist technologies. Core ICTs are personal technologies immediately available and easy for students to use to support their learning. These technologies allow for a diverse range of pedagogies and provide our teachers with a common and consistent ICT foundation. All students in Years 2-12 have an iPad as their core ICT for learning, which they are responsible for managing. Students in Prep and Year 1 use school supplied and owned iPads (1:1 deployment). All teachers have an iPad in addition to this, we provide specialist ICTs, which are technologies needed in specific subjects for specific purposes, e.g. Art, Business Studies, Film Television and New Media, Graphics, Information Technology Studies, Media Studies, and Music. The College provides these facilities in accord with, and matched to, the requirements of the particular subject. Mac or Windows, desktop or laptop. Students often use their iPads to supplement specialist technologies.

We are often asked why Redlands College selected iPads as our core ICT. The reasons are many and the longer we use iPads in learning, the more evidence emerges to verify our decision to do so. The features of iPads facilitate and enhance the user experience, making them easy to integrate in teaching and learning.

Incorporating iPads in Teaching and Learning

Prior to providing examples from our journey of realisation, two significant theoretical underpinnings for the integration of ICT in teaching and learning need to be briefly explored. The first is the TRAIck framework, the second is the SAMR model for technology integration.

TRAIck framework

The TRAIck framework (Koziner & Motlhok, 2009), conceptualises integration of ICT in terms of teachers’ knowledge. Specifically, the framework emphasises that balanced teacher application of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and technological knowledge with consideration of the schooling context is significant for the integration of ICTs in learning. The framework was created in response to observed limitations on ICT integration caused by imbalanced development of technological knowledge disengaged from content and pedagogical knowledge.

The SAMR model (Puentedura, 2013) describes the ways teachers commonly integrate technology in learning. The model suggests that, initially, teachers use ICTs to enhance existing practice. ICTs are used as tools that are direct substitutes for existing practices with no functional change or they augment existing practices with some functional improvement. Greater engagement may lead to transformation of existing practice by using ICTs to significantly modify practice and, potentially, redefine practice through the realisation of new opportunities. As a model, SAMR emphasises that ICT integration is a journey. It is also a useful tool for analysing modes of ICT integration.

The following success stories about the integration of iPads in teaching and learning at Redlands College are presented to illustrate how iPads can be used to enhance and transform practice in Years 8-12. They represent a small sample of the many great opportunities achieved by our Prep to Year 12 teachers and students over the last few years.

Enhancing Practice

In addition to the many iPad uses that are commonly available via all modern ICTs, such as WWW, email, instant messaging and document creation, our teachers have identified a number of ways to use iPads to substantially enhance teaching and learning. Indicative examples of enhanced practice are listed below, only specifically on iPad features.

As a replacement and improvement on paper-based resources, our teachers have created and distributed handouts and test sources as digital documents, PDFs and eBooks. Students use a range of apps to work with or annotate (e.g. PDF Expert) these resources. Functional improvements included the opportunity to quickly search the content of a resource, easily export annotations, and efficiently store and share files.

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Chris Blundell is Academic Dean of Redlands College. As an ICT in learning enthusiast, he has actively explored, through 22 years of practice, the place of ICTs in pedagogy, learning, and assessment. Chris has been pivotal to the development and on-going implementation of the Redlands College iPad programme as a school leader and teacher. Chris strives to find more meaningful ways to enhance and transform education using personal learning technologies. In support of this end, he is engaged in a doctorate degree with QUT.

About Redlands College

Redlands College is an independent, inductivity school in Wellington Point, Queensland, providing quality educational experiences within a Christ-centred environment for students in Prep to Year 12. The school has a strong focus on students and their learning built on strong, respectful relationships. Redlands College first introduced 1:1 iPads in Years 9 and 11 in 2011 with the goal to enhance pedagogy and learning. The programme has since expanded to incorporate all Year groups. Using iPads as tools to enhance learning was an important first stage of a journey that continues to produce important and useful outcomes. We continue to strive to make the opportunities of integrating iPads and other ICTs in learning.
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Our staff have been able to readily achieve forms of iPad integration that enhance existing pedagogy because iPads can be easily used to support or supplement curriculum. For example, one student created anime-style illustrations on his iPad which he published online along with videos demonstrating techniques used. Another student independently composed and recorded a song using her iPad and the GarageBand app which was runner-up in Triple J’s Unearthed High in 2013. As a learning community, it is highly rewarding to see students independently pursuing personal passions and sharing the outcomes of their learning with others.

Conclusion

Our experience with the integration of iPads in teaching and learning has emphasized to us the importance of acknowledging that all participants – teachers and students – are on a journey of realization. Integrating any form of ICT in learning is a challenging, yet rewarding endeavours that requires engagement and time. For schools who have just or are about to embark on this journey, we offer the following:

• iPads can promote engagement and help to facilitate new learning opportunities. The resultant transformed pedagogy and assessment seem to be more student-centric, often collaborative, and more authentic in nature. Relative to PARADIGM, iPad use seems to demonstrate highly integrated technology-pedagogy-content knowledge. Teachers who have transformed pedagogy with iPads often challenged their own thinking and existing practice; they willingly and confidently tried different approaches.

References


The integration of ICT into schooling provides students new opportunities for students and teachers to engage in learning, and after all, isn’t that the purpose of schools?

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the efforts, dedication and professionalism of my colleagues at Redlands College. The examples cited in this article are the products of the outstanding work of many of our teachers. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Dale Lopez, ICT in Learning Co-ordinator; and Robert Richmond, Manager Operations, and his team for supporting our teachers on their journey. For more information about the Redlands College iPad programme, including other examples of teaching and learning outcomes, please visit our portal: https://ipad.redlands.qld.edu.au.

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STUDENTS PURSUING PASSIONS

In addition to our teachers finding great teaching and learning opportunities, our students have found great ways to use iPads for their own learning. The App Store has allowed students to find specific apps to match specific needs, including apps diary and task management, apps to complete subject-specific tasks, and apps that complement their learning style. It is not unusual for students to share a newly discovered app with their teachers, parents and friends, often simply arguing the benefits and functionality of the tool.

Some of our students have used their iPad’s facilities to further pursue passions and interests. For example, one student created anime-style illustrations on his iPad which he published online along with videos demonstrating techniques used. Another student independently composed and recorded a song using her iPad and the GarageBand app which was runner-up in Triple J’s Unearthed High in 2013. As a learning community, it is highly rewarding to see students independently pursuing personal passions and sharing the outcomes of their learning with others.

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