

5 Critical Mistakes Schools Make With iPads (And How To Correct Them)

Over the last few years K-12 schools and districts across the country have been investing heavily in [iPads for classroom use](#). EdTechTeacher has been leading iPad professional development at many of these schools and we've seen firsthand how they approach iPad integration.

While we've witnessed many effective approaches to incorporating iPads successfully in the classroom, we're struck by the common mistakes many schools are making with iPads, mistakes that are in some cases crippling the success of these initiatives. We're sharing these common challenges with you, so your school doesn't have to make them.

1) Focusing on content apps



The most common mistake teachers make with iPads is focusing on subject-specific apps. In doing so, many completely overlook the full range of possibilities with the iPad. I think of a Latin teacher who declared the iPad useless because he couldn't find a good Latin app.

It simply didn't occur to him use the [VoiceThread](#) app to record his students speaking Latin, or perhaps create a collaborative discussion of Cicero. Or use the [Animoto](#) app for a lively student presentation on Latin vocabulary, or the [Socrative](#) app for a Latin quiz, or the [Explain Everything](#) app to create a grammar tutorial. There are so, so many possibilities, yet he was oblivious to them.

At our *iPads in the Classroom* summer workshop at Harvard University we spend three full days with teachers actively exploring effective iPad integration tools and strategies.

And we don't introduce a single subject app. Instead we focus on the amazing range of consumption, curation, and creativity possible across grade levels and subjects using only four general apps: an annotation app, a screencasting app, an audio creation app, and a video creation app. In our workshops conversations about pedagogy center the iPad properly as an effective learning device. The content comes from a wide range of materials available across the Web and in our classrooms, not from apps.

2) Lack of Teacher Preparation in Classroom Management of iPads



One of the obvious mistakes is failing to provide teachers with adequate professional development. Before handing students iPads, schools sometimes give teachers their own, assuming teacher use in a personal environment will translate to expertise in a work environment.

It doesn't.

Teachers need instruction on how to incorporate the devices into the learning process, which is quite different than trying out a few apps.

Decades of research has shown that when teachers have access to new technologies, their instinct is to use new technologies to extend existing practices.

Without guidance, iPads become expensive notebooks used by students in very traditionally structured stand-and-deliver classrooms. Teachers need time for professional collaboration (and often external support) to learn to nurture reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills and to develop strategies to differentiate instruction using a range of apps and tablet-friendly Web tools.

Even the basics of workflow— sharing materials, collecting student work, making comments and grading, passing student work back—can be unfamiliar to teachers and quite complicated. The challenges of iPad workflow include understanding cloud computing environments and options, how different apps and types of files interact with each other, file format compatibility and file conversion tools, evaluating all-in-one management solutions, and translating these concepts simply and effectively to students.

Simply handing a teacher an iPad in advance won't serve to address these challenges when the school year starts. Fortunately, many early adopters have workflow plans that address these challenges, and schools need to protect their teachers from reinventing the workflow wheel.

3) Treating the iPad as a computer and expecting it to serve as a laptop.



Focusing on iPad-versus.-laptop comparisons

stifles the ability to see how the iPad facilitates student-centered learning. [iPads are devices meant to compliment computers](#), not replace them.

So, people who seek equivalent functionality become frustrated, and fail to realize the intrinsic benefits and features of the iPad's native design.

Instead, schools should focus their energies on what iPads do best to engender active learning. iPads enable students to kinesthetically connect with their work (especially important for young learners). These tactile elements – using fingers to zoom, rotate in, pinch close, or swipe across – as well as increasingly interactive and immersive apps, facilitate hands-on learning.

In addition, iPad mobility means that students can take pictures, record audio, and shoot video, in any number of places. They can tell multimedia stories, screencast how to solve math problems, create public service announcements, simulate virtual tours of ancient cities, and so much more. Active consumption, curation, and creativity suit the device. Stand-up-and-deliver teaching does not. So, put the iPads in the hands of teachers who understand that active learners learn best.

4) Treating iPads like multi-user devices



iPads were designed as a single-user device and not meant to be shared via carts. Financial constraints have forced many schools to abandon 1:1 aspirations, but sharing them separates the functionality from the user. Carts that rotate through several classrooms force teachers to take time away from learning, create a nightmare of student accounts, and often focus attention on workflow systems rather than learning.

Instead of [sharing iPads across multiple classrooms](#), schools should be allocating them to a few select pilot classrooms for an entire year. Schools should be documenting pilot group successes and failures and begin to codify iPad integration functionality and elicit best practices to serve as a foundation for future iPad expansion. If a school cannot envision financially moving to a 1-1 iPad model, then Bring your Own Device (BYOD) models may prove much more compelling than shared iPad systems.

5) Failure to communicate a compelling answer to “Why iPads?”



Many school administrators simply fail to communicate to their constituents why they've purchased iPads. As a result, many initiatives face resistance from teachers, parents — and even students — who don't understand why these devices are being introduced into their classrooms. Letting the purchase speak for itself isn't enough — districts need to explain why they've invested in these devices.

While iPads are engaging, technology needs to be — above everything else — in the service of learning. Administrators who fail to articulate the connection between iPads and learning often hamper their iPad initiative.

School administrators should be explaining to their constituents that the iPad supports essential skill areas — complex communication, new media literacy, creativity, and self-directed learning. Instead of focusing on the convenience of ebooks, they should instead be emphasizing the incredibly immersive and active learning environment the iPad engenders and the unprecedented opportunities to develop personalized, student-centered learning. They should highlight some of the beneficial consumption, curation, and creativity activities the iPad facilitates — as well as the student empowerment it inspires.

School administrators should point out the improvements in teacher management of classroom time and space afforded by iPads, as well as the incredible flexibility it provides to vary learning activities at a moment's notice. Finally, they should remind their constituents that with iPads students have the world at their fingertips— anywhere they might be — and the only limitation to what students might do in this vast space is the vision of educators.

Increasingly a 21st century education is less about place and more about space. And the iPad has become the leading device in which students can navigate and create exciting new worlds. Yet, when this device enters classrooms its impressive immersive capabilities are often overlooked or underdeveloped.

With more schools opting for 1:1 student-to-iPad access, there exists a tremendous opportunity for a transformative shift in classrooms where students are empowered to navigate their own learning.

Yet, from our vantage point, momentum for redefining the educational map with iPads is often derailed at schools as a result of a limited vision of the device and a failure to prepare teachers effectively. Schools that share a common vision for learning, extensive support for teachers in learning to use these new devices, and a willingness to learn from the teachers around the country who have already piloted these tools are much more likely to reap the benefits of their investments in iPads.

Be sure to check out the [November 6-8 EdTechTeacher iPad Summit](#) to learn even more about these issues and solutions.