

Pop up classroom - Keeping things simple with tablets

For the past few months, I have had the pleasure of travelling and working in Brighton. This is part of the project for the Tablet Academy who are supporting the Fonthill Foundation's pop up classroom in the Marina. I have been working with a number of schools in Brighton, the work has been primarily involved with iPads but the experiences I will discuss are based on tablets in general. Incidentally, I'm writing this in my car and using the Siri capability of entering text by talking and I'm trying to do the whole of this document this way.

What I want to do is to describe the work that we have completed so far with pupils aged from reception up to year six, as well as SEN children up to the age of 18. This will provide some good guidance and advice in helping decide on a reasonable strategy to get started with these devices.

The biggest stumbling block with any implementation of a tablet strategy is engaging and encouraging teachers to move with the technology. How this is done and how it works is very much dependent on the school and the age of the pupils that are being taught.

Teachers in some cases have great difficulty in trying to appreciate what the potential of a tablet can bring to the classroom. I have trained a lot of teachers around the country in the past 18 months and a common issue that I find is that a lot of them like the tablets but they tend to just use it for email and Internet browsing. The key is trying to get them past this and that is normally unlocked by finding them a useful app or feature or something that is simple to do that instantly makes a change to the way that the children can learn or find out things for themselves.

People can get carried away with the vast amount of apps, but in all practicality there are a low number of apps that can really get you started and appreciate what the capabilities of the tablet are. These are in the creativity area and for that we mean things like creating e-book's or creating comics strips, as a means of putting text and pictures together in the same document. Doing things with movies, which are very simple and easy to do with a tablet, but very difficult to do without a tablet is an important development. At the same time they allow students to learn and have some fun at the same time! For teachers, the ShowMe, Explain Everything style apps which act like recordable interactive whiteboards are probably the initial starting point that would get teachers' really interested and hopefully allow them to start thinking about flipping their classroom.

What I would like to show over the next few pages are different types of activities using tablets - in this case iPads - to engage and demonstrated to the teachers how they can be used with the students in a learning environment. The most important thing is the standard teacher phrase of keeping it simple. The schools

involved were a mix of those who have never used tablets in the classroom before, to those with a 1:1 implementation at the beginning of the school year. The tasks took place between April and July.

1st exercise – the Tablet as a looking device

I'd like to start with an exercise that is really an exploration exercise that you can do whenever you go to a new place whether it is the Museum, at the marina or the duck pond for example. I completed this task with the number of different schools who visited the pop-up classroom and also allowed them to explore the marina. This was in a lot of cases the first time where the teachers and the students had iPads as a group. So I decided to keep things really simple, to prove to the teachers that the sort of exercises that you can do straightaway are very simple and straightforward.

The idea was to use the iPads as the student's eyes and ears as I described it to them. The plan being that they would take the iPads around and explore the Marina area that was the shops, the actual boats and the restaurants and take photographs rather than snaps of things that interested them and try and find a different way of photographing famous logos rather than just looking at them head on.

It sounds really simple and in fact it was. However, one of the things that I tried to do was to make the children appreciate what makes a good photograph so ensuring that they could all manage to take photographs from the iPad, and for the older children videos as well. They went out and were encouraged to think before they took a photo. For the older children they were given the task of finding people who are willing to talk to them to find out more about why they were at the Marina. They seem to really enjoy interviewing strangers, with teachers present of course, and having got their permission. But it was a very useful exercise and provided a lot of interesting videos at the end.

On their return to the pop up classroom, we then spent some time reflecting on the photographs. For this we managed to get the children to sit in pairs and with one iPad on the floor, one of them would go through the photographs with the other person, then swap, and this proved to be a rather interesting part of the day. I am a firm believer in the fact that at times there is a good noise in the classroom and this was one of those moments. It was evident that the discussions that took place and the intensity and seriousness of the children took to this part of the exercise made it invaluable and a very useful reflective moment. The partner who was looking for the photographs had to make a decision whether it was a good one or a snapshot, in which case it was deleted so it was not going to be used in the next part of the session.

The final section, consisted of me demonstrating an app and going through it with the children showing them how to actually add their videos or their photographs.

The two apps in question were Book Creator and Strip Design. I tended to use Book Creator for children in Year 3 and above and Strip Design for children in Year 2 and below.

What was evident is that the children have a natural ability to get on with it and it is absolutely straightforward to use, and children just seem to understand what the app is trying to do etc. and that they are quick to put things in.

I would like to discuss Strip Design (Comic Life is an alternative too as well as others). This is an excellent app and allows students to take photos either from the camera or insert from their camera roll. Then they can add texts and some special effects text but the most important thing is to add text. This is vital because it is an excellent literacy tool, the exercise being they have to label their photographs. One really useful feature of Strip Design is the ability to insert a live map of where they are which in case was a satellite image of where they were and they really loved that part!

I have samples of work of this from a visit to the supermarket which we did to tell the story of the healthy pizza as well as going round the marina and discussing that.

The other app was using Book Creator. This really is an excellent app and really must be the first app that you download. There are versions for Android and for Windows. What makes it stand out for me is the fact that it actually allows a true multimedia input and output in a single app and it's very simple to use and is really teacher friendly. I've used it for a lot of training and whenever I demonstrated it to teachers they think it is great no matter what level of teaching they carry out and they will get rather excited by the possibilities that this app can offer.

Initially the exercise was used when I had the older children from Year 3 upwards. However, as I got into the exercise with more schools I felt that the younger children could make use of it and instead of typing they could do audio descriptions of the photos in their books, and in the final sessions this worked really well so it's open to any age really. Children who struggle to type things down – SEN, younger years etc would find this app fantastic as it enables them to put down their thoughts in a different manner.

The samples of working enclosed clearly show that the children have tried to take some proper photographs and have placed successfully the photographs or the videos into a book or a comic strip.

The teachers left very happy first of all the exercises were successful and they could see how tablets can make a difference. One of the big things is that one does not often have 20 cameras that one can use and the moment when the students are looking through the photographs of the big screen of the tablet is

something that would be extremely difficult to do with the small screen of a normal digital camera.

This was the exercise that would have been incredibly difficult to be done using normal cameras that was really very easy to do using tablets. This is the secret of success for implementing tablets in schools. It can make teaching life really easy.

Exercise 2 – Food and literacy

This exercise was to help with Years 1 and 3 with their topic on food. For the school I was working with were very keen on visiting the Asda store that is on the marina and so I had arranged with Asda that we could go in and have a look around and take various photographs. Be warned, supermarkets don't normally like people taking photographs of the food, but they do have a community liaison person who arranges visits to the supermarkets.

The idea was to describe using photographs and in sequence how a healthy pizza is made. Again, the exercise is relatively simple. We went to Asda with the children and they were divided into small groups of 5-6 with an adult. Then they go to various departments including fresh fruit and veg, the cheese area, finding the flour aisle, the tin tomatoes area, and finally the pizza making area. We were very lucky that the ladies involved in the pizza making were quite happy to stop and demonstrate for the children who then took pictures of how they make pizzas from the base and put on the ingredients to make a healthy vegetarian pizza – a bit like Hollywood with all the tablets and children snapping away!

I must say having very small children walking around Asda with iPads taking photographs of lots of objects and everything else did cause quite a stir in a positive matter. Everyone seemed very happy to see the children at the supermarket who were all extremely well behaved. I must also at this point thank Asda for the help and support in making this possible and they were a joy to work with. The school staff deserve praise for their efforts and organization.

Then we went back to the classroom and we actually spent time learning about Strip Design. As mentioned before this is an excellent app for helping with literacy and what we did with the Year 3s was for them to produce 4 four pages with the 4 pictures on each. They had to ensure they were in the correct sequence for a pizza being created, and each photo had a description. For Year 1 we had to keep it simple. So we asked them to prepare to 2 pages with four pictures on each and simply to make sure that they were in the correct order and that each picture had either a single or a few words to describe it.

This exercise was used by the the school to help develop the children's literacy and numeracy skills. Using Strip Design forces the children to have to think about what they need to write and then ensure that they can write it down correctly. The

teachers actually felt this exercise was really useful because it covered the topic of food at the same time ensured the children are developing their literacy skills.

Conclusions

This will be a brief summary of the main points to come from the project undertaken above.

- Even though the technology is relatively easy to use, and a lot of people have smartphones (using similar technology), teachers **still need a lot of hand holding** to help them use it effectively in the classroom.
- **Keep things simple** – until people find their feet, always an essential element to bear in mind. When initially planning this project the original idea was to use lots of apps and do some really exciting things with tablets. What the teachers really wanted was a simpler approach, and so what you originally plan to do, should be halved and possibly reduced again to find that perfect balance, between success or trying to do much!!
- Make use of the **creative apps** rather than get into an app frenzy. So Book Creator, Strip Design (Comic Life), iMovie Trailers are the early keys to success. Get to use these effectively and they are enough to transform what you do. Then move onto others.
- For some teachers simply get them **used to one app**, and really get on with it well. Let them move on when they are ready.
- **Children are naturals at this technology**. It is amazing to see them use iPads at the age of 5 – some have other devices at home, and yet they are perfectly comfortable getting on and using the apps. The staff look on with wonder at their natural ease of use.
- **Push the children!** With the exercise in photography, you have to raise your and their expectations of what makes a good photograph. Give them the room to show you what they can achieve. As they are naturals, then there is not the usual things that can get in the way of them being creative, literate etc, so push them as the tablets gives them an advantage.
- The child's engagement and natural ease with the devices was another thing that some teachers found interesting. **This is a technology that grabs and holds their attention**, and they really like using them.

- **Time to reflect.** The tablets provide a great medium where children can reflect or complete peer assessment. In another exercise, they were writing books in book creator, and then for the final section of the lesson, they passed on their book to a colleague who then either completed an audio or video feedback on what they thought about their book and placed it in the book. This proved really useful for the SEN children who attended the session.
- **The power of the selfie!** Yes the selfie camera is a very powerful tool for the tablet. It enables feedback as mentioned above, but also a chance for the teacher to record themselves comfortably in order to introduce topics, or to allow them to Flip the Classroom!
- **The Power of Words.** It is possible to say what you want in a variety of different ways. You can type, you can speak it, you can record yourself on video, or you can draw it. This is one of the main elements of the tablets that has yet to be explored fully but provide one of the major gains for children and their learning. I have seen it so many times when a child's inability to type fast has impeded their ability to demonstrate their knowledge, this should be a thing of the past!

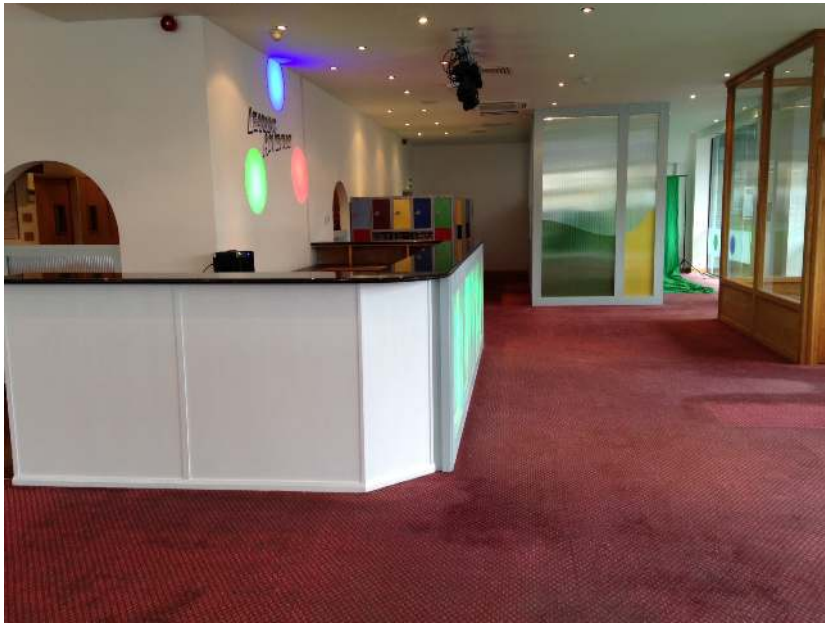
.... and finally, Siri?

How did I get on? Well it is a very fast way of inputting text into a document. This case study was something that I had spent a long time working out how to start and using Siri enabled me to get started very quickly and easily. However although it is 98% accurate, and really good, you do need to proof read the document afterwards as you do the final formatting and editing. So a success!

Appendix A – Sample of works produced for these projects.

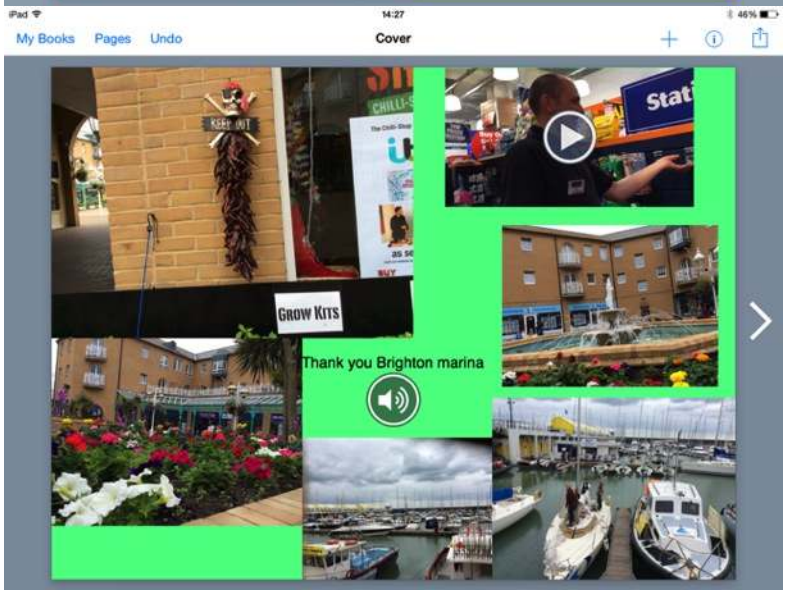
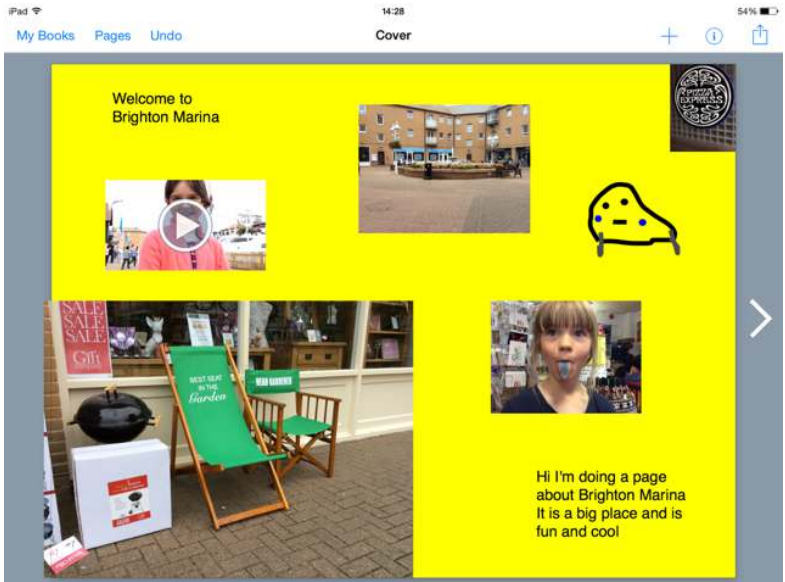
Pop up Classroom

“21st Century Learning space” - teacher



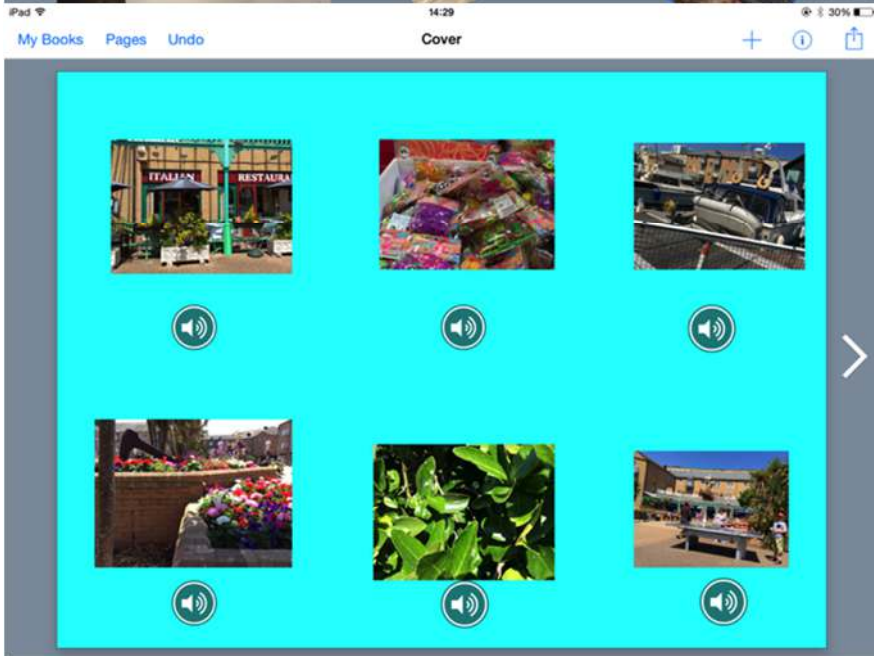
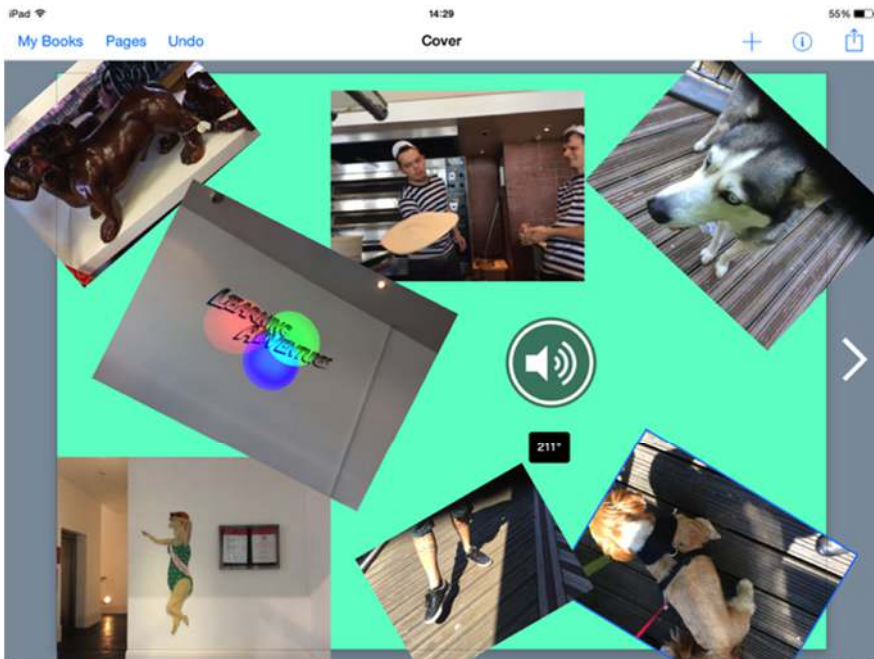
Exercise 1 – Trip around the Marina

Year 5 trip – App – Book Creator



Year 2 – App – Book Creator

Quality photographs from a 7 year old



Exercise 2 – Healthy Food

Year 3 trip to ASDA – App – Strip Design

