



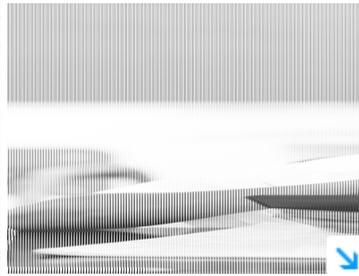
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Tablets and the future of education

Gayle Bennett, for Dell 8:11 p.m. EDT April 28, 2014

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This spring, fourth-graders in a Tallahassee, Fla., classroom chronicled the life cycle of plants. Preschoolers in Mesa, Ariz., practiced Spanish, and special education students in Phoenix communicated aloud with classmates and teachers.

Sound like typical activities from classrooms of yore? Sure, until you learn that students used tablets to do all of these tasks.

In a mere four years, tablets have gone from gee-whiz gadgets to household items. And in the field of education, they have become a must-have for students and teachers.

Between 41 percent and 66 percent of students in K-12 schools had access to mobile devices at home and in the classroom in 2013, according to Speak Up, an initiative of the education nonprofit Project Tomorrow. And that number continues to grow as



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educators and policymakers tap into the movement.

"When tablets are used effectively in the classroom, I've had teachers tell me they can never go back to the way they taught before," says Julie Evans, CEO of Project Tomorrow, which tracks technology in K-12 classrooms.

Teachers use the technology in a variety of ways. Learning apps, online educational videos, e-textbooks and Internet access can enhance the classroom experience. And one of the biggest benefits is the real-time feedback on how students learn and retain new material; with polling apps, teachers can know right away if a struggling student needs extra help.

While tablets have been in some classrooms since 2010, it's taken a few years for teachers to learn how to use them effectively. That effort is still continuing, but the overwhelming majority of educators think it's worth the time and effort. In fact, 81 percent of teachers think mobile devices enrich classroom education, according to a 2012 survey by PBS LearningMedia.

With tablets, teachers need to think differently about how they guide the classroom experience, Evans says. "Often it means a migration to more project-based learning," as opposed to the teacher mainly lecturing during class time, she says.

With the popularity of online lessons such as those offered for free by the Khan Academy, students can reverse the routine, listening to the lecture during homework time at night and using their teacher's guidance to do homework in the classroom during the day.

A teacher in Chicago also recently had students use an app to read about current events. She then asked them to do Internet research based on the readings and create a PowerPoint presentation. The teacher was "thinking about, in this case, a reading comprehension lesson in a much different way," Evans says.

WHAT DOES TOMORROW HOLD?

While tablets have the potential to change American education for the better, something very simple, but logistically and financially difficult, needs to happen: Each

student needs one, experts say.

Many schools can't afford to make that 1-1 ratio happen. Others have been reluctant to let students bring their own tablets to class, a practice called "BYOD" or "bring your own device."

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But the mindset is changing, says Keith Krueger, CEO of the Consortium for School Networking. "Kids who have (devices) will be encouraged to bring them for learning. For equity purposes, those who do not have them will be provided them," he says.

The data back him up. The Speak Up project found that 36 percent of principals said they would allow students to bring their own devices in 2013, up from 22 percent in 2010.

Teacher training will continue to be important, though it will be more self-directed. Evans sees more and more teachers using Twitter, blogs and online groups to network and learn from others educating with tablets. "I have teachers tell me all the time that Twitter is the best professional development tool they've ever used because they are able to go out and ask specific questions, or they can follow people who are experts," Evans says.

And someday soon, experts will be able to harvest the data housed by tablets and apps to personalize the learning process and measure the effectiveness of teaching methods. The tech company Applied Predictive Technologies dived into this arena last December, crunching data collected by mobile devices at a Washington, D.C., charter school. The goal was to find out which type of student benefited from the tablet-based typing and reading programs.

"Analyzing data from mobile devices has great potential and people are interested in it," but it's only just beginning, says Evans.

She sees another, more low-tech practice emerging that could be a game-changer in the classroom: students leading the way. As more pupils use tablets at home and at school, they bring ideas about how to use the technology to the classroom.

"The opportunity will be for the teachers to decide whether they are comfortable in that shared power or collaborative learning environment, where they are as much a learner as their students are," says Evans.

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