

iPad Pilot Project

Six students were chosen to participate in the iPad project for Basic Algebra based on their work ethic in the preceding math course. I chose a mixture of ages, races and mathematical ability in order to get a varied experience with the technology. My plan was to use an app called HMH Fuse, an interactive textbook with tutorials, videos, and homework that is reported to an online server accessible to the instructor. We would also meet only 3 days a week and use GoTo Meeting and Adobe Connect on the 4th day of the week for course interaction. I also made my students keep a weekly journal with their experiences with the technology, course, and other items related to the iPad.

SETUP AND USE:

Based on anecdotal and journal evidence, the younger students had no problems setting up their iTunes accounts and downloading apps and the textbook. One of the older students in the course struggled with getting her account set up and relied on her daughter and husband to do such tasks. About 1/2 of the students really embraced the technology and felt comfortable adding and deleting apps and modifying their iPads to fit their individual needs. Some students were reluctant to use it for aspects outside of the classroom because they "felt like it was the schools property".

HMH Fuse:

The textbook has many great features such as interactive exploratory applets where the students can drag a line across a graph and witness the equation changing and self-check quizzes. Unfortunately the customer service for the publisher was horrible and we had some problems getting the homework to report to the server for one of the students with no help from the help line. From a teacher perspective, the data collected was good as it disaggregated it to the different sections of the textbook and showed at a quick glance what the students were struggling with so I knew best what to teach face to face. But unless I could be guaranteed that all students would have working accounts, it is not a worthwhile use of the funds that it took to purchase the text and the time that it has taken contacting customer service.

Student Feedback: The students all enjoyed the videos and said they liked having access to those when they were stuck because it felt like a teacher was in the room with them. 66% of the students felt like there was not enough practice problems given in the textbook. The two students that disagreed with this statement were the younger students and it would seem that possibly they did not need as much practice in order to make the concepts "stick".

GoToMeeting vs Adobe Connect:

Teacher Perspective: I was not satisfied with either software as I had used Elluminate which has tons more features and allows the teacher to do much more. For example, it is difficult to import a grid to show students how to draw a graph on both programs. You could import the image but you were not allowed to draw on it. I tried placing a graph on a word document and then uploading so that I could draw on it but the image was too small for the students to view and they could not enlarge it on the

iPads. Another drawback is that Elluminate allows the user to save all the “slides” so you could refer back to them which GoTo and Adobe do not. Once you erase your screen it is gone. If I was only given a choice between Adobe Connect and GoTo Meeting, I would choose Adobe Connect. There were a few more options – such as the polling feature and file transfer features. Both software were easy to set up.

Student Feedback: Students liked both software because of the ability to still have teacher interaction but at home or in an alternative place and time besides a structured class time. They did state that headphones were necessary because there was lag time between audio conversations and sometimes you would hear yourself on the call based on the speakers. Most of the students stayed at Ft. Riley to access the classes so unsure if it is the internet connect. One student did state it was faster from her house and the lag time was shorter if she did not use headphones. Students thought it was easier to access the recordings of Adobe Connect. All students liked Adobe Connect more than GoTo Meeting.

Grades:

Because it was such a small class, it was impossible to compare grades to a traditional class. Two students did drop because of personal issue and work issues. So there were only 4 students that finished the course. Two of those students did similar to their grades that they received in the pre-requisite course. One student (who I did not teach in the previous class) did fail and in his last journal he discussed his work schedule as possible reasons. He also mentioned being distracted by the technology when he was at home and not using it for school as much as he should have. The fourth student had a better grade than her previous class.

Summary and Conclusions:

The class was really too small to make comparisons of grades and how the course was taught and if iPads made a difference. Two students did purchase their own iPads and have still been using the HMH Fuse App in Intermediate Algebra to graph and review. I have also seen them demo-ing the software to their classmates. From my perspective younger students were easier to adapt to the change and more willing to try to do math on an iPad instead of the traditional paper/pencil homework and exams.

I can see using an iPad as an alternative to ITV but I would also suggest looking at other software besides just GoTo Meeting and Adobe Connect. These two programs seem better geared towards a business environment. It will be hard to simulate the ITV classroom capability because of how the camera/video is positioned. For example, in Adobe Connect, I was only able to get 3 people to show at a time to see the students but it covered up the whiteboard area. In a software such as Elluminate, the videos of the students are small and above the whiteboard so you can see them and also use the whiteboard. Students did feel like using the virtual conferencing could replace the traditional classroom setting. One student mentioned in their journal, “I learned just as much on the days I was looking at Ms. Sullivan in the classroom and when I was at home in my pajamas.”