West Suffolk College: iPads and Apple TV - Transformational learning in the 21st century

Summary

West Suffolk College is embracing the iPad, Apple TV and other tablet devices over the interactive whiteboard in a move away from the didactic teacher-led approach to learning. As a result, Health and Beauty, Sports, Dance and Music departments have experienced a transformational use of technology. Learners can now record, annotate and feedback performances instantly on the field of play, film and watch live massage demonstrations in the salon as well as utilise expensive audio equipment through different apps.

About West Suffolk College

West Suffolk College is a rural Further Education college with its main campus located in Bury St Edmunds. In addition, the College has local centres in Haverhill, Ipswich, Mildenhall, Stowmarket and Sudbury.

In 2010/11 student enrolment was 18,738; 2466 full-time and 6975 part-time. In addition to Full-time, Part-time and Adult Education, the College has a large contract for Apprenticeships and training for businesses, working with more than 1500 employers.

West Suffolk College is also a centre of University Campus Suffolk, and provides full and part-time degree courses for around 771 students.

The challenge

West Suffolk College first began installing interactive whiteboards more than 10 years ago and today they are available in almost all of classrooms. However, like many other colleges and schools they have found it very difficult to get staff beyond using the boards as simple whiteboard replacements or as projector screens for PowerPoint.
“Very few people are using the full functionality of the whiteboards. It’s a bit like buying a Ferrari and running around doing the shopping in it.” Ray Robertson, e-Learning and Learning Technologies (ELLT) Manager

The functionality of the boards is continually increasing but the level of staff use remained static. The whiteboard companies also continue to update their software, which often means that older boards cannot run the latest version.

“When you start looking at the white boards at £3,500 you start questioning the value. We realized that we could buy a number of iPads, Apple TVs or tablet devices which would give us the same functionality at a much lower cost.” Ray Robertson, ELLT Manager, West Suffolk College

Ray and Lecturer, Niki Kearns began to assess whether they should concentrate all class technology budgets into interactive whiteboards and accessories, or whether they should look for an alternative solution, which would deliver more value and more flexibility.

“A teacher with an iPad can walk around the room. Ofsted are increasingly pushing against the didactic teacher and the whiteboard by its very nature ties you to that position.” Niki Kearns, Lecturer, West Suffolk College

With a tablet-centred learning environment Ray and Niki realized that they could potentially enable teaching staff to project their iPads wirelessly, through Apple TV, or with Android tablets using a cable in the classroom.

“Ultimately we are looking for complete flexibility. We want multiple connectivity in our teaching rooms so whatever the person brings in we could cope with it.” Niki Kearns, Lecturer, West Suffolk College

Although the college are unable to predict future developments in technology they believe that the interactive whiteboard is very much part of the old guard of static teacher-led learning delivery.

“We’re not sure what is going to be around in three years time. However, if the iPad is totally redundant by then, we haven’t got these big expensive devices stuck to the wall.” Ray Robertson, ELLT Manager, West Suffolk College

Another consideration for Ray and Niki was the fact that Apple seem to have embraced the education market much more than many of their competitors.

“There’s a lot of work that’s been done in the USA where whole counties have bought iPads and every child has been given one. So there’s lots of research that’s been done showing how they can work in education.” Niki Kearns, Lecturer, West Suffolk College

Ray and Niki felt that there was always a risk that staff wouldn’t be able to use whiteboard equipment correctly. A number of times staff have gone into a class and struggled to get them to work correctly.
“There’s more faith in the iPad if you know how it works. Staff can just switch it on and start using it. You’re not reliant on other people helping and supporting you to use the technology.” Niki Kearns, Lecturer, West Suffolk College

The activity

Around two years ago Ray and Niki began trialing iPads across the college. Last year the college decided to test out Apple TV devices.

- The college started with a slow roll-out to staff who put forward a case report stating why and what they would use the iPads for.

- School heads were then given them and some individual schools were allocated up to five devices for in-class use.

- Ray and Niki held sessions around the college showing staff how to use iPad apps in the classroom, and how to use the devices with a projector and cable.
“When we started getting a buzz about the iPad we spoke to our deputy principal who looks after the ELLT budget, David Howells, and he was very interested in investigating further.” Ray Robertson, ELLT Manager, West Suffolk College

Most of the iPads have been purchased via the ELLT department budget and research and information has been collated by the team from various sources including Apple, Jisc RSCs, LinkedIn and the wider peer community.

Ray and Niki have been well supported by senior management and have distributed around 80 iPads to different departments. They generally use the budgets to trial technology that the various departments wouldn’t always risk on purchasing.

Although the team have received a great deal of support from senior management and certain staff they still face obstacles. These include awareness and understanding of developing pedagogies and staff time to develop new resources and delivery methodologies.

“We don’t have mandatory professional development for ELLT so we are not forcing people to upskill. This means we tend to get a hardcore of enthusiasts and those who have already bought into the change coming along to training sessions.” Niki Kearns, Lecturer, West Suffolk College

Ray and Niki believe they will soon reach a point where a laissez faire policy to learning technology will no longer be acceptable.

“What is going to push the learning technology agenda more are the expectations of both learners and Ofsted. Learners raised in the 21st century have different needs and expectations to their predecessors and OFSTED are no longer satisfied to see teachers simply using technology, they now want to see staff using technology in an innovative and transformational way.” Ray Robertson, ELLT Manager, West Suffolk College

Ray and Niki have been able to push forward their tablet-centred learning agenda by researching on the internet, and finding case studies and blogs which look at how the iPad has been used for teaching and learning.

“We’ve found some case studies from schools in the UK. We’ve also learnt from what they are doing in South Korea, Australia and America. We’re all talking about the same things: iPads, flipped classrooms and MOOCs, which didn’t really happen 10 years ago.” Niki Kearns, Lecturer, West Suffolk College

The ELLT department now promotes the use of iPads and cascades information and training for staff through their blogs, Twitter feeds and YouTube channels. They also run an iPad user group once a term, where they share what staff and students have been doing, and showcase resources.
The outcomes

Because of the introduction of the iPad, staff are becoming more willing to accept technology in the classroom. It’s motivated and spurred them on.

As more staff use this technology, everything becomes more accessible, easier and quicker for students.

Benefits of the iPad and Apple TV include:

- **Reduced time lag and technical issues when setting up to use in the class. No login, no boot-up time.**

- **Access to computer labs is no longer essential for certain activities as they can be completed using a tablet device in the timetabled classroom.**

- **Easy access to the internet and other reference sources whilst taking part in a lesson is non-disruptive, and can be done at the desk – sharable/portable.**

- **Students and staff are able to download documents, take photos or videos and put them straight onto YouTube.**

“Before iPads were there, it was almost science fiction to think of the lecturers and students having that technology in front of them. You would have to book a classroom, get computers and waste 40 minutes logging in. It wasn’t as accessible. The iPad has started to break that culture down.” Ray Robertson, ELLT Manager, West Suffolk College

Here’s how different classes are benefiting from the iPad and Apple TV.

- **Hospitality Lecturer, Andrew Pettigrew has saved hours of time by using the iPad. He no longer has to walk around making notes, then go back and sit at his desk to type everything up and then distribute assessments. He has pro-formas that he has prepared in the Pages app and he walks around, observes what the learners are doing, fills in the assessment on the document, takes photos and embeds them in the document, drops it in dropbox, and emails the assessment to the students.**
The Hospitality lecturer, Andrew Pettigrew can now complete all of his assessments on his iPad using pro-formas created in the Pages app.

The Sports department can now analyse and annotate performances on the field to give students instant feedback.
• The Sports department has adopted the iPad to record what’s happening in the field where previously they would’ve just observed it. They are using the Ubersense and Coaches Eye apps to analyse and annotate videos of their play. If they are observing football, rugby or golf, they can then feedback instantly in the field or classroom. The students can keep the records of the observation and it can be used as evidence to use for their assessments.

• The Hair and Beauty department use iPads in the salon to film massages, hair processes, and then upload them to YouTube. They can then embed the videos back on the Moodle site for the students to access. While they are videoing they’ve got the iPads connected to projectors so students can see the demonstrations in real time.

• The Music performance department have used iPad apps such as jamup, where they can experiment with different amplifier sounds and effects pedals. The students can play around with the app in the rehearsal studio rather than bringing all of their own effects and amplifiers into college.

“For the Sports, Dance and Music departments the use of the iPads and availability of apps has been transformational for the learners. In the past you couldn’t have conducted sports analysis or used a variety of musical effects and amps without spending tens of thousands of pounds, so it’s been a transformational use of the iPad.

“Hair and Beauty can just watch demonstrations straight away after being recorded on the iPad. The college can’t afford live classrooms, with cameras everywhere, but the iPad allows you to do something very similar, and improve that quality of learning.” Ray Robertson, ELLT Manager, West Suffolk College
The Hair and Beauty department can film massage demonstrations on the iPad, so students can watch them in real time and also on YouTube.

Staff have given their feedback on the benefits of the iPad and Apple TV:

“Use of the iPad encourages autonomous learning. Learners enjoy and know how to use the resource, and it can be used anywhere.” Rachel Anderson, Hair and Beauty

“Using the iPad within an educational environment, predominantly in the training kitchens has allowed me to track and assess students quickly and efficiently, placing pictures directly onto the assessment form. These assessment forms can be quickly uploaded or transferred using an assortment of programmes, giving instant feedback where necessary.” Andrew Pettigrew, Hospitality

The impact

The ELLT team conducted a survey to learn more about the impact of the iPad around the college.

After surveying 161 students they discovered:

- 45% believed that an iPad is preferable to a laptop/PC and 27% said they prefer a laptop/PC.

Respondents were also asked how they thought an iPad would make learning more effective for them:
• 19% said research is easier with an iPad, 17% said being able to access course materials quickly in the classroom is helpful, and 13% said being able to edit and create documents quickly is useful.

Ray and Niki believe that the iPad and tablet devices can have a substantial impact on the college’s learning environment in the near future.

• Potential furthering of the ability to facilitate individualised learning through use of apps, web based resources, social tools and collaborative activities.

• Teachers’ confidence and skills improve with this type of device due to the accessibility and non-technical start point. There is increasing motivation to consider technology applications as being part of the learning environment.

• From a management perspective there will be a change of focus on budgets as for years the college spent hundreds of thousands of pounds on computers.

“From the point of infrastructure, the impact of the iPad will lead to a completely different looking classroom. Hopefully we will see a less traditional shaped classroom as you won’t have that focus at the front anymore.

“In our new building we are not installing the static whiteboards. Hopefully it will leave the classroom structure to be flexible forever more.” Niki Kearns, Lecturer, West Suffolk College

The lessons learned

• Unlike other technologies, tablets work out of the box, however an element of CPD has been required, with minimal technical support.

• Sharing of good practice and discovered apps is essential as the device and its applications are cross-curricular.

• Make sure staff put forward a good case for what they want the iPad for. Ask them how it would benefit the learners or what difference it would make in the classroom.

• Don’t allow yourself to become too wedded to a particular tablet device, such as the iPad. Your personal preference for a device might not be the best solution for everyone. You should remain flexible.

• You should try tablet devices now even if you’re waiting for prices to go down. Technology is moving so quickly you’d have missed all of that ground work, knowledge and experience.
• Whether they are iPads, Chromebooks or Nexus tablets it doesn't matter. You don't want to be out of the loop with learners, who are increasingly using them and their expectation is that they can use them anywhere.

Useful links

West Suffolk College ELLT blog
Teachthought blog
EduDemic blog
Video demonstration 1
Video demonstration 2
Video demonstration 3

Disclaimer

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