

# Tablets (e.g. iPads and other handheld computer touch screen devices): to use or not to use?

Lyn Bower



Lyn has been involved in early childhood for over thirty years in learning contexts ranging from kindergarten to university. Lyn is the author of four of the Early Childhood Australia Learning from Home series, and co-author with Will Jones of another book in that series. Lyn also produced a number of videos while a lecturer at USQ. Since moving to Dalby, Lyn has undertaken a twelve-month teaching contract with a local kindergarten where she introduced the use of a handheld computer touch screen device. Lyn is continuing to work with children exploring the opportunities of this new technology.

Young children are exposed to more technology than ever before, and we cannot close our eyes or pretend that this will change. If fact it will only grow and will change the way we do everyday tasks, or the way we use appliances – just look at the capability of mobile phones, compared with what they were five years ago. Are we prepared for this? What should we do as teachers who believe play is important for children, or even that children should have limited access to computers or similar technology?

I have always been an educator keen to explore and try new experiences with children. Having said this you can imagine how excited I was when I first played with a tablet. My first thought was should I, or how could I use this with children. It was different from the computers we use with kindergarten and Prep children, and although I was hesitant I still had a burning desire to try it. Here was a piece of equipment that could play, store and record music and voice, take and store photos, use a wide variety of apps, access the internet, email and much more.

*It seems only limited by your creativity and your knowledge or understanding of how it works, and what apps and utilities are available.*

I searched the web for research or articles about using a tablet with preschool-aged children and found very little. The next question was how would I approach using a tablet with children when there was little information to base it on?

*I came to the conclusion that over the years all equipment used with children would at one stage be new, maybe based on previous experiences, maybe not.*

What did I have to lose to try this? Then it hit me. Why should I be hesitant when I encourage children to explore and be curious? Why should I be different, and that was all I needed.



Learning with a tablet.

### Getting started

I did have concerns about the care of a tablet and if I could let go and allow the children to use a tablet unsupervised. I am still wrestling with that thought and it's probably the result of having borrowed the first tablet I used. I had no need to be concerned. I talked to the children about how we should use and care for a tablet. I was teaching the children about respect for equipment and responsibility, just like any other piece of equipment. This was another opportunity for intentional teaching. The children were keen to use a tablet and were very receptive to making sure their hands were clean, dry and that only fingers were used and that it was used in a 'safe' place.

Some of the children already had experience with their parent's mobile phone so moving to a tablet was only a matter of size, and an increase in size was appreciated. They were also familiar with some apps.

*Although I shouldn't have been, I was surprised to see how easily the children used a tablet, almost intuitively.*



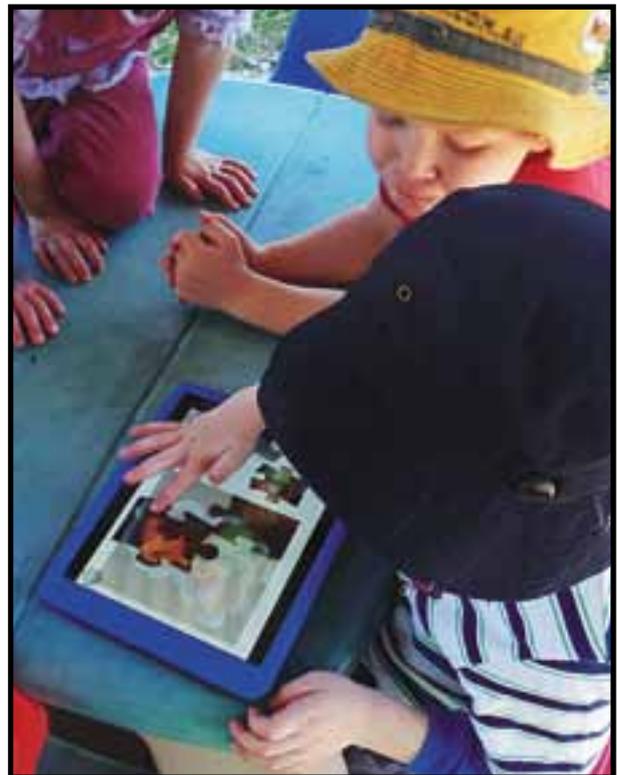
*Children use a tablet almost intuitively.*

They approached a tablet just as they do any other equipment. They were experimental and had no fear or concern about breaking anything, doing something that might cause it not to work, or doing something that couldn't be undone. In short they were playing, problem-solving and exploring. Why then should we be hesitant?

Perhaps we are concerned with the amount of time children use modern media. Journal and research articles sometimes report that children might be watching too much television, or spending too much time sitting in front of a computer. This is often reported in newspapers, emphasising the negative. Should this be a concern? Yes, it should. However, it shouldn't be a reason for not using a tablet, or other media. It's just another opportunity for open discussion with colleagues, research and planning like any other piece of equipment.

One aspect that needs to be considered is that a tablet, although similar in some aspects, is not used in the same way as we use computers.

*... For one thing, there's no intermediary between you and what you're trying to do on a regular computer ...*



*If you know how to point you know how to use a tablet.*

If you know how to point, you know how to use a tablet, and that's the truly exciting thing about this device, it makes personal computing truly personal. (Asadi 2012, p 8)

### Choosing the right apps

*To make the most of your tablet you need to understand a little more about apps and the utilities that enhance its performance.*

Apps vary in quality and price so you need to choose carefully. This is not always easy as there are over 200,000 apps available. You can only use an app after you have purchased it and for this reason it is important to carefully read the reviews for each app, or speak to colleagues, so the apps you purchase are appropriate and worthwhile. Interactive books are very popular and educationally rewarding. Some apps are very formal with worksheet type activities and not appropriate, but sometimes rate well due to their perceived educational content. Surprisingly there are art or drawing apps that provide the same creative opportunities as crayons, brushes

and pencils and paper. Again choose carefully as there are apps that read as though they offer creative opportunities when in fact they are very limited.

### Researching with a tablet

A tablet can also be used as a research tool for the children if connected to the web via a sim card or Wi-Fi. However, you if you are using the web ensure you have the most secure filters and closely supervise at all times as you would with any computer connected to the web.

### Recommendations

I recommend purchasing a tablet with 64 GB. You are not able to add memory to a tablet and I find it's much better to have spare memory rather than not enough.

Buy a protective cover for the back of your tablet and a screen cover to prevent scratches and oil and grease marks. I recommend purchasing a smart cover. They are easy to put on and take off but the advantage is that they put the tablet to sleep when the screen is covered.

Read the User Guide so you can fully understand the tablet's capability. It's easy to read and will help you appreciate the potential for learning.

*Enjoy your tablet, it is a very powerful educational tool if you spend time learning about it and playing with it, just as you would let children play with it.*

### References

Asadi, A (Ed) 2012, *iPad for Beginners*, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Dorset.



*Researching with a tablet.*