Integrating the iPod Touch into Classrooms to Support Mastery of State Standards

A pilot program proposal by Courtney Simson
OVERVIEW

I propose to create and oversee a pilot program for the Tahoe Truckee Unified School District that brings 21st technology into the hands of teachers and students in classrooms. Based on the highly successful “iREAD” program in the Escondido Union School District led by Kathy Shirley, now in its sixth year, iLEARN will be implemented first at one school with three to four teachers in grades third through fifth. This will keep costs down and prove its positive educational impact on student learning. (For more information on the program in Escondido, including its history, national awards it has won, and a sample of data, please see the last pages of this proposal.) Ideally, this pilot program would begin in January 2012 and run through May 2012. At that time, it would be evaluated and, if found to be worthwhile, it could be expanded to include more teachers, schools, and grade levels for the 2012-2013 school year.
Teachers would fill out an online application to apply for this program. Self-starters who love challenges and innovation would be ideal participants. The selected teachers would be required to attend a mandatory monthly two-hour after school training session, post two project ideas on Edmodo, post an evaluation of their project and a personal reflection after implementation, and include digital examples of student work. In addition, they would be expected to collaborate regularly with other teachers and myself through Edmodo’s blogging feature, sharing ideas, asking for help, and commenting on others’ posts. (Edmodo is a free and secure networking site for educators and their students. It was something we used heavily in iREAD, and it was a terrific collaboration tool. With Edmodo, we really became a professional learning community.)

Teachers placed in the iLEARN program would receive the following equipment: six 4th generation iPOD Touches with built-in cameras, one 13 inch Macbook Pro with Apple Care protection and iWORK software (it comes with iLIFE software already), six Belkin
audio headphone splitters, six additional sets of M and M’s headphones to allow two children on each iPOD, and six wall chargers with a power strip. This equipment is described in detail with pictures later in this proposal.

This equipment will be theirs to keep and use as long as they complete a year of iLEARN, remain in the Tahoe Truckee Unified School district, and abide by the requirements of the program. Teachers who do not attend mandatory training sessions for reasons other than emergency or illness or do not post required projects in a timely manner will relinquish all equipment so that it may be signed out to another teacher on the waiting list.
TRAINING SESSIONS

I will instruct teachers in all aspects of the use of iPOD’s to enhance their curriculum and aid student achievement of educational objectives. Teachers, as well as their kids, need time to become familiar with the devices and comfortable using them, so we will proceed with “baby steps”, building on skills as confidence grows.

At the kick off session (which will be held on a Saturday morning for four hours in order to introduce a good foundation of skills and provide guided practice), instruction will focus on management of the equipment so it doesn’t “walk” away, how to keep devices and kids organized, how to use the audio features on an iPOD to introduce simple fluency activities, buddy reading, applying reading strategies out loud as kids read Houghton Mifflin
stories or pages in their Social Studies or Science textbooks, and how to save projects and sync student work to the teacher’s new laptop. I will help participants set up “playlists” in iTUNE’s for the purpose of downloading audio instructional materials, (like the CD recordings of the Houghton Mifflin stories), and create a place for each student’s work to be saved in an audio “portfolio” that can be shared eventually with parents or other teachers. We will look at the iPOD’s included dictionary, thesaurus, timer, and note taking features, and learn how they can be used successfully with children. I will also introduce some good apps for practicing math and spelling skills.

At subsequent meetings, teachers will learn how to use the built-in camera and audio components to create small, powerful multimedia projects with the kids to further cement skills in reading, language arts, math, or social studies and science, using apps like Storyrobe, Storykit, Photo Wall Lite, Comic Touch Lite, and so forth.
We will also begin to explore the Internet feature of the iPod Touch. It truly is like having a computer in the palm of your hand. For a fraction of the cost of a student laptop, kids can do research, type information and save it with pictures and titles, find appropriate images to incorporate, and insert music and sound effects into their projects that have been selected and downloaded to the iPod’s by their teacher. And just like the computers in the lab, the iPod’s will be set up with “Nanny Net” restrictions, so kids will only be able to visit pre-approved sites and see G-Rated images. (They are also blocked from the “Game Center” and may not order from the “iTunes’ Store”. These iPod’s are for educational use only, and they will not find “Angry Birds” on their device anywhere! Now, spelling practice games...that’s different!!!)

Within just a few months, teachers will have been introduced to a wide variety of excellent apps for education that have been implemented in classrooms and found to be very valuable. These apps can be used by the kids to do amazing projects, practice skills, and to work in small groups and with partners.

On the EUSD iREAD website, examples of student work and video clips showing kids using iPod’s in the classroom can be viewed. Go to the EUSD Homepage at www.eusd4kids.org, click on “Teachers”, scroll down and click on “iREAD”, and take a look. I can also share Edmodo projects and some of the things my kids have done over the last three years on request.
THE iLEARN CLASSROOM

I believe it is vitally important to empower classroom teachers to integrate technology on a regular basis in the classroom with their students. I understand there is currently an excellent tech pullout program, in which expert tech teachers pull out students for work on various skills in the computer lab. This is wonderful, and the kids are lucky to have the new Mac computers and this high level of instruction from people who love technology. But for the teachers themselves to be able to engage, inspire, and challenge their children within their own classrooms, the proposed iLEARN program can be extremely beneficial. It’s really not hard to implement at all with the right equipment and an experienced and
motivated leader, and I am excited to step up to the plate if this pilot is approved.

In Escondido, we found that all participants, after just a bit of training and some time to try things out, were so excited and pleased by the results that they began to brainstorm other great ways to use the devices with the kids on their own. They found new apps to share with the other teachers, and collaborated often to bounce ideas off each other.

We found using iPod’s works with gifted kids, special ed students, and average learners. It’s terrific for ELL’s, who need lots of oral language practice that teachers may ordinarily have difficulty providing. (Using iPod’s, the kids are frequently speaking, listening to themselves, and self-correcting at a level that is difficult to achieve otherwise.) And, as I found out last year in my sixth grade inclusion class, using iPod’s is even effective with kids with emotional disturbances. It worked well with kindergartners through eighth graders, and, though I have no experience with this, I would imagine it could work well with high schoolers!

With six iPod’s and splitters, teachers can assign individual tasks, use the devices in centers, or have kids pair up with a buddy. At the beginning, that is enough to get the show on the road. Eventually, some teachers who take to this and stay with the program beyond the first year can be designated “One-to-One”, and have a full class set of iPod’s. I was the first middle school teacher in Escondido last year to do this, as a group of elementary teachers had successfully done the year before. Once every kid has an iPod, the sky is the limit for using them in creative and interesting ways. I believe this program can grow, and will grow.
LIMITATIONS?

Currently, school districts using iPOD’s in the classroom are limited by APPLE to using only “free” or “lite” apps, as these are downloaded onto multiple iPOD’s. Interestingly, this does not turn out to be a big problem. More and more new apps appear daily, and developers are including a “lite” version which is free. We found incredible apps to use without any problems whatsoever, and never seriously missed the additional bells and whistles included in a paid version.

On that topic, there are thousands of apps out there that are useless, inappropriate, or badly designed. Teachers in the program will receive regular updates on great apps to download and use.
MY ROLE

Here is a bit of background on me:

I am the 2010 Teacher of the Year at Rock Springs Elementary School, where I taught fifth grade for five years, and a two time Elementary Educators Association Teacher of the Year in 2000 and again in 2010. I have taught in the Escondido public schools full-time since 1987 from second grade through eighth, and was GATE Site Coordinator at three sites for twelve years. In addition to IREAD, I was in a program called “Project Live” for the last five years, learning how to teach kids to create instructional videos. My students have won awards for their videos all five years, and the last project, “Recycle Rap”, won awards at the city, county, and state levels. I have successfully applied for and received four grants in as many years from the Escondido Education Foundation, using the money to buy additional iPOD’s, digital cameras, and last year, audio books with hardcover copies to be able to do Literature Circles with iPOD’s with my two blocks of sixth grade Humanities students. I love technology!

I am excited to lead this program. I believe computers and devices like iPOD’s can transform education.

As far as my responsibilities for the pilot and for further expansion of the program, I would be involved in leading all
aspects: recruiting and selecting teachers, creating a website with links to additional support, resources, and research concerning iPod’s in education, emailing participants and troubleshooting for them, training at our monthly after school sessions, creating handouts to help teachers implement various parts of the program, and visiting classrooms weekly to offer support and applaud successes. In June, I would love to put together a showcase for the School Board members, students, teachers, and families so the kids can share their great work and talk about how the program has helped them grow academically.

I have built some tech assistance hours into my budget proposal. Kathy Shirley has, at year six, three tech assistants, as things sometimes go amiss with hardware in the computer, and people with a background fixing those issues are often able to help the teacher quickly. Also, tech instructors sometimes have levels of expertise, say, in something like Garageband, and are a valuable asset to training sessions. I foresee that the support of one tech person for an hour per week to help fix any hardware issues and field and respond to some of the teacher’s emails would be important. I would also like the person to attend and help present topics at the monthly meeting. I believe for the pilot, that would be plenty of help. (If the program grows dramatically year two with successfully securing grants, we would need to reevaluate that. I can believe hours on the job would increase for both of us, and would need to be reflected in the budget.)
CONCLUSION

As we learned recently when Steve Jobs stepped down as CEO of APPLE, two-thirds of their current profits come from devices that didn’t even exist five years ago. This is the world in which our kids are growing up. They are the digital generation, and will be participants in cutting edge technology in future years.

I believe teachers need to jump in with both feet and use technology with their kids to increase student engagement and motivation. This will show their students that the classroom is not a place separate from “their world”...it is an active, exciting PART of it! Kids love iPod’s, and when used to support educational objectives, they can and will make great strides in academic skills and confidence.

We can start this program small, and like a little pebble tossed into a pond, it can create a ripple which, over time, can draw in more and more teachers and students. I can apply for grants from
APPLE and other big companies who support technology in education, and we can make this dream come true. It’s good for us, it’s great for the kids, and it’s a direction I think education needs to take to give our children the skills they will need to compete and thrive in our increasingly technological world.

Please see the following pages for the proposed pilot program budget, justification for first year expenditures, and a description of the successful iREAD program in Escondido, California.

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