

The Case of the iPad

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Editors

The Case of the iPad

Mobile Literacies in Education

 Springer

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Introduction

If desktop and laptop computers were initially the domain of commercial and educational worlds and only later became part of everyday spaces, mobile devices, such as smartphones and tablets, have needed no such transition and have rapidly infiltrated all walks of life. They are used not only by administrators, scholars and students but also in daily life in homes, in restaurants, and in a wide range of retail, service and tourist industries. There is a pressing need to understand the mobile literacies associated with such devices and their take up in different jurisdictions, as well as the role that they play (or might play) in the lives of children and adolescents. In many parts of the world, digital devices and the texts they mediate are embedded in everyday life from the earliest years (Razfar & Gutierrez 2013). In the UK, for example, nearly three-quarters of children aged 3–5 have access to a touchscreen device at home (Formby 2014), and surveys report an increase in tablet ownership amongst children (Ofcom 2016). In the US, ownership of tablet devices in families with children aged 8 or younger increased fivefold from less than 8% in 2011 to 40% in 2013 (Rideout 2013). In many households, tablets have become the device of choice for family entertainment, used for on-demand TV, games and interactive stories. Increasingly, educational literacy practices too have fallen under the sway of devices like the iPad, which appeals to educators because of its size, portability and intuitive touchscreen interface (Merchant 2015).

This widespread availability of portable digital devices, and their increasing use within educational settings, suggests a need to re-draw maps of literacy development to account for emerging forms of semiotic representation and patterns of interaction (Merchant 2012; 2015). At the same time, the distribution and use of tablets and high-speed internet access remains uneven, patterned by differences in economic wealth as well as practices associated, for example, with gender, ethnicity and class (Black et al. 2014; Rideout 2013). Furthermore, in educational settings, literacy tends to be conceived in ways that contrast with the hands on, mobile, free-ranging and often diverse engagements with texts associated with tablet use at home. Not only do we need to know more about how meanings are made around iPads and similar devices, but we also need to understand the distinctive ways in which mobile technologies are being put to use in educational settings. While there

is no doubt that mobile technologies present us with new affordances, the material nature of learning and literacy raises new and interesting issues for pedagogy. Educational researchers and practitioners need ways of understanding the varied ways in which children, devices, texts and sites intersect and work to construct one another, and how mobile literacies work as ‘placed resources’ (Prinsloo 2005) embedded in and inflected by wider economic, political, societal and historical forces.

Building on a well-received symposium at the 2015 American Educational Research Association international conference in Chicago, this edited collection brings together an international group of scholars working in literacy studies who have investigated the use of tablets in a variety of settings. Approaching associated literacy practices from multiple theoretical perspectives, the chapters interrogate the relationship between tablets and literacy in different ways. The book focuses on tablets, and particularly the iPad, as an instance—or *case*—of mobile literacies, but is designed to speak more broadly to research focused on literacy and mobile devices. We see the significance of mobility to literacy first in relation to the portability of the device, second in relation the fluid movements between apps associated with mobile devices, and third in relation to the movement of ideas and practices associated with tablet use.

Together the chapters in this book address the ‘Case of the iPad’ by exploring multiple ways of conceptualising meaning making around tablets, placing a particular focus on the embodied, material and situated experiences produced when hardware and software with ‘global’ circulation are taken up in local educational settings. The chapters exemplify these perspectives using data from studies investigating iPad use in a variety of locations: in homes and in early years, primary and secondary schools, as well as post-16 settings. Chapters range from those framing tablet use in terms of a micro-analysis of practices to those examining the broader political, economic and social flows that inflect available opportunities. Together they address the complex and multiple forces associated with the distribution of the technologies themselves and the texts they mediate (popular children’s stories, games and so on), and consider how apps, adults and children work together as iPads enter the mesh of practices and material arrangements that constitute the institutional settings (Schatzki 2005).

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