Tables in the primary classroom

Some teachers are talking and writing in increasingly positive terms about the use of tablets in the classroom (of which the iPad is one type). This leaves others wondering if they should follow suit and purchase tablets for their school.

As the purpose of educational technology is to support learning, one may ask whether tablets will help address the school’s learning and teaching priorities and bring about desired learning outcomes.

What are Tablets?
Tablets are lightweight, portable wireless computers, which run special software applications (apps), use touchscreens and have multiple functions such as internet browsing.

Educational Considerations
Like laptops and netbooks, tablets support pupil centred learning, enabling the possibility of ‘anytime, anywhere’ learning, including outdoor learning opportunities. Tablets offer new capabilities and possibilities for learning and teaching. Pupils can use them to support independent, differentiated and personalised learning. Tablets have the potential to introduce more fun into learning, facilitating higher levels of pupil motivation and engagement.

Evaluating Tablets and Apps
Before investing in tablets, it is important that teachers are confident that they are making an appropriate learning choice for their school. An advice sheet on tablets has been prepared by NCTE (now PDST Technology in Education) to support schools in their decision making – see link below. Schools could do some online research starting with the links in this advice sheet, ask one or two teachers to trial tablets in various learning situations, visit neighbouring schools that may be already using them and otherwise evaluate their potential in the context of the school’s e-Learning plan.

In terms of identifying relevant educational apps to use, there are thousands available and many are free to trial, though quality can vary. Scoilnet’s pick of apps suitable for primary classes is at www.scoilnet.ie/Educational_apps.shtm

Other Considerations
The effective use of tablets relies on a good wireless network in the school. Schools will need to have enough capacity to enable several tablets to connect simultaneously to the network or internet.

The usual purchasing considerations need to be taken into account including technical support/warranty, insurance, replacement devices (including end-of-life replacement) and storage/charging facilities. Apps may also have to be purchased and shared across devices before and after the tablets have been purchased.

Tablet Advice Sheet
An advice sheet for schools is available on the NCTE website at http://advicesheets.ncte.ie.

Compiled by PDST Technology in Education (formerly NCTE).

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Attention Principals – CPD for additional (Croke Park) hours

Did you know that PDST Technology in Education (formerly NCTE) provides both online and face to face courses on ICT which could be completed by a whole school staff as part of the plan for CPD provision during additional/whole school hours?

Online
There are courses of varying durations which are available during specific dates and are supported by an online e-Tutor. There are also some short courses (approximately one hour each) which do not require an online tutor and are therefore available 24 hours a day for an entire term. See www.ncte.ie/onlinecourses.

Face to Face (f2f)
The service also includes CPD on using ICT in the classroom that is delivered in your own school as whole school training (WST). See the new course information booklet Using ICT for Teaching and Learning: ICT Courses for Teachers 2012/2013, which is available from your education centre, for details. Please direct all enquiries regarding WST to your local education centre.

For all the latest information on PDST Technology in Education/NCTE courses, please go to www.ncte.ie/ICTTraining