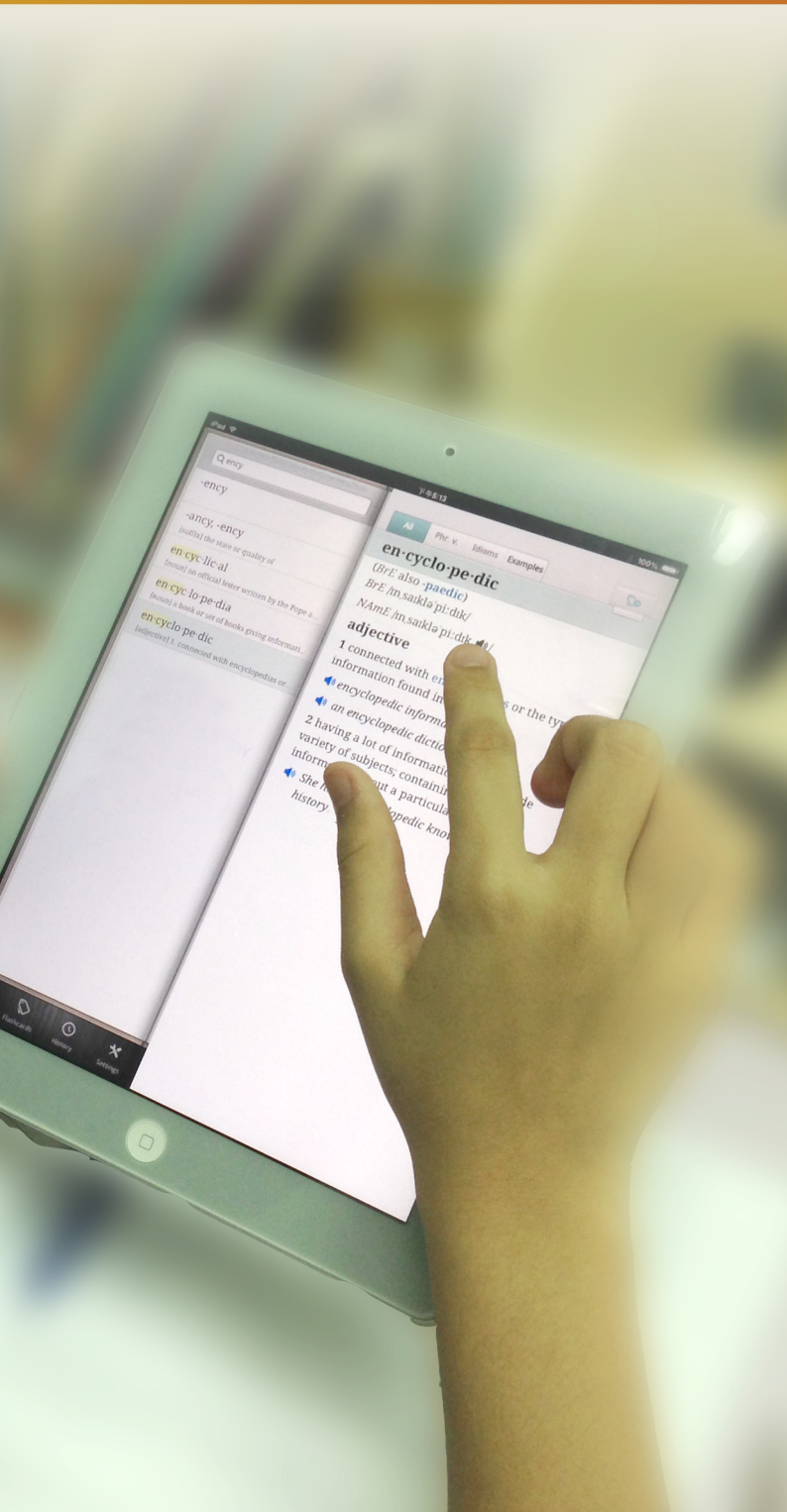


My experience of using *tablets* in the classroom

KaKa Chong



In the twenty-first century, what can highly motivate students to learn? What should they be equipped with for the unpredictable future? How can they learn effectively and integrate knowledge of different fields? With these questions in mind, I am keen on adopting different approaches to teaching and prepare my lessons from a student's perspective. Last year, my school offered me an opportunity to use tablets in my English lessons. According to various articles, educators have different opinions on using tablets in the classroom, so I decided to explore the possibilities of teaching and learning with the devices. Having carried out thirty lessons with tablets, I would like to share my experience with you all.

There are around forty Junior 1 students in my class every year. It is challenging for me to get all their attention and determine how well they understand the lesson. However, with the help of certain applications on tablets, I can gather and display their answers with just a few taps. In this case, all the students must respond to my questions because the data reflects their learning progress. The passive students who used to listen to the active ones' answers are required to interact with their classmates. Their answers indicate what they have already mastered and what I should discuss further with them. In fact, greater efficiency in teaching and learning can be achieved with the tablets.

Nowadays, students like spending time on social media. For this reason, they are requested to express their ideas of certain topics by posting messages in a forum or recording their presentations with tablets. They are eager to share their thoughts with one another and with me because they will get instant feedbacks in this way. In addition, I believe that students learn in various ways. Although some are not brave enough to voice their opinions in front of everyone in class, it does not mean that they are not attentive. Therefore, communicating with their peers and the teacher on tablets may offer them an alternative way of learning. Furthermore, with the help of tablets, the lesson has become student-centred. Students no longer wait for the teacher's model answers. Instead, up-to-date information is available at their fingertips and they can do research at their own pace. In other words, they have personalized the learning experience. So, what is the role of the teacher? I consider myself a leader and an advisor since students are not able to analyze all the information and they may not know the foci and the learning objectives of the content independently.

Nevertheless, there are pros and cons with everything. Although I want my students to regard the tablet as a learning tool, a few of them may be running some other apps while learning. They lack self-control and easily stray off the learning process. In this way, the tablet has become a big distraction instead. Besides, some of them do not take the lessons seriously. They think sharing ideas in class is just like chatting with their friends on social networks. There are thus some inappropriate expressions in their responses. Moreover, the network problem is a barrier to conducting a good lesson. There may be some bugs in the apps and the network may not be stable all the time. As my students are only 12 to 13 years old, they are not capable of solving the IT problems. In this situation, I myself have to deal with all the difficulties without neglecting the other students.

It is not easy to carry out an interesting, effective lesson at all. However, from my experience, teachers must discuss the rules and the ways of operating the tablets with their students in the very beginning so as to avoid chaos. What is more, teachers must allow more time for tackling some unexpected problems. Moreover, it takes time for students to get used to the new way of learning. They may be good at playing computer games but learning with tablets is a totally different matter.

So far, I have not come to any conclusion about how well tablets can help teaching and learning. I would like to try more apps and explore the possibilities of using them in education. I do not think tablets make perfect learning tools but teachers should get students exposed to different learning devices so that they can choose the most suitable way of learning and can be flexible enough to cope with the unknown future. I hope more Macau teachers will try tablets in school, so that there will be more discussion and sharing about it. Then, both teachers and students can experience different aspects of teaching and learning and our competence will thus be significantly improved.