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Four-year-olds (from left) Harry Ward, Alice Egerton, Emma Dickson and Ted Henderson all use iPads at the Kelburn Little School in Wellington. Picture / Marty Melville

iPads bridge kindy generation gap

Preschool pupils outclass teachers with their grasp of new technology

By Amelia Wade
amelia.wade@nzherald.co.nz

Kristiana Denford-Deck is meant to be the one teaching preschoolers, but these days she often finds the roles reversed, with her young pupils showing her how to use her centre's iPads.

"They're the new generation and they know more about them than I do – they tutor me," the Little School teacher said.

"Because touch and feel is something so important in those early years, it's something they pick up really quickly. It's something that's practical and easy for them to do."

Tablets are becoming increasingly common in early childhood centres as learning tools that help teach kids maths, literacy, sharing and motor skills.

At four of the five Little School centres around New Zealand, the iPads are used as tools for learning rather than play. (The fifth, in Auckland, doesn't have them yet.)

The private preschool chain decided to purchase five iPads for each centre because the owners said children were surrounded by technology so it made sense to incorporate it into their education.

The children have been using the iPads for six weeks and the results are already apparent.

Throughout the day, the young students are taken into a separate

room in small groups and use the tablets in pairs, playing interactive games that help their mathematics and language skills.

Children are also taught the tools' value as well as how to look after and use the iPads.

"You get amazing amounts of

It's something that's practical and easy for them to do.

Kristiana Denford-Deck, preschool teacher

communication and lots of teamwork happening," Ms Denford-Deck said.

A Christchurch centre for preschool-aged children with disabilities has also been using iPads as a tool to assist learning and help children's cognitive development.

Champion Centre director Susan Foster-Cohen said the staff were amazed at some of the barriers the children had broken through with the help of the technology.

"We're finding that with some children, they're able to tell us what they know through an iPad in a way

that they're not able to tell us through verbal language," Dr Foster-Cohen said.

"For example, if they've got to make a choice between items or they've got to show us that they understand the difference between same and different."

The centre doesn't own any of its own iPads – but a staff member and a number of parents have the gadgets.

Dr Foster-Cohen said staff at the centre made sure the children knew the tablets were used as one of many tools to help them learn and didn't replace physical and verbal interaction.

iPads were particularly helpful for children with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome and autism.

"Because it's a machine it's sometimes easier for [the children on the autistic spectrum] to engage with."

"They can often find interacting with humans overwhelming," she said.

"It's an exciting new addition to our tool kit."

But not all parents are pleased about iPads creeping into early childcare education – one Nelson mother said she would be concerned if her 4-year-old son came home singing the tablet's praises.

Angela Cox, a kindergarten teacher herself at a different centre, said it was important for youngsters to be exposed to technology, but that was a parent's responsibility not the school's.

"I send my son to kindergarten so he can develop social skills and I don't think an iPad does that . . . I don't think they have a place in early childhood centres."

Top 10 apps for preschoolers

1. The Wiggles 'Wiggly ABC'

Ages 2+
 \$2.99
 Designed to help kids learn to recognise the letters of the alphabet with interactive games.

2. AniMatch: Animal Pairs and Sounds Matching Game

Ages 2+
 \$0.99
 A technological version of the game "Memory" which gets kids to match interactive animal pairs. Helps develop memory skills.

3. Dr Seuss's Beginner Book Collection #1

Ages 0+
 \$12.99
 It's expensive but features three different play modes – read it to me, read it myself and autoplay – and contains five classic Dr Seuss titles.

4. ABC Expedition

Ages 1+
 FREE (for a limited time)
 Takes children on a trip through a zoo while teaching them the alphabet.

5. Peppa Pig Happy Mrs Chicken

Ages 3+
 \$2.99
 Follows the storyline of the television show with a number of farm-themed games that help develop hand-eye co-ordination, memory and matching skills.

6. Itsy Bitsy Spider HD

Ages 2+
 \$1.99
 Uses the nursery rhyme "Itsy Bitsy Spider" to teach and entertain, with interactive games that promote number recognition and counting skills.

7. Dora's Enchanted Forest Adventure

Ages 3+
 \$1.99
 An interactive read-along storybook from the popular television show.

8. TallyTots

Ages 18mo+
 \$1.99
 Designed to help kids count – covering everything from basic number recognition to counting using games.

9. Doodlecast for Kids

Ages 1+
 \$1.99
 A fun app for kids who like to draw. Children can also record a story about their picture.

10. My Colouring Book

Ages 1+
 \$0.99
 Features a large range of colouring templates.

* List compiled by Practical Parenting magazine.

Golden oldie good debut for new company

This class-clash Pygmalion dramedy – an oldie but a goodie – makes a great choice for the debut production of the professional Newmarket Stage Company. It's a relatively gentle, fourth-wall two-hander – wonderfully written, full of jokes and bons mots.

And they do a very good job. George Henare – who, in his mid-60s, must be the hardest-working man in Auckland showbiz – enjoys a little lightness (with undercurrents of tragedy) between the high drama of *Awatea* just past and *Death of a Salesman* to come. He plays the elder academic Frank suitably quietly and deeply, belying the character's insistence that "there's less to me than meets the eye".

His working-class student Rita (Jodie Hillock) lives up to his claim



Janet McAllister Review

Theatre

What: Educating Rita
Where: Opera Factory, Eden St, Newmarket, to September 8

that she's "the first breath of air that's been in this room for years". Hillock's Rita caught between two worlds is bright and spunky from the outset. Both actors are at ease in their

long conversations, director Adey Ramsel using movement to keep us interested in a long play of vignette-like scenes set in one room.

Ramsel also designed the set as a collective cultural imagining of an academic's den – wonderfully shabby, cluttered, with a leather wingchair, shelves falling down, and the whiskey hidden behind the Elliot.

Playwright Willy Russell criticises working-class culture – his own roots – but doesn't look to the middle classes for all the answers. In the play's sharpest line, Rita accuses Frank of liking "to keep your natives thick, because that way they still look charming and delightful". But Russell's not preaching; this is a funny, entertaining night out into another world.

May Newmarket Stage Company enjoy a long and healthy life.