

“iPod, therefore they learn”*: iPods in the Higher Ed Classroom

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Does doing it with technology necessarily mean doing it better? Those of us who are educators committed to promoting the use of technology in the classroom must necessarily negotiate our way around this question in order to accommodate the so-called “millennial generation”. Sometimes, however, we make assumptions about our students’ attitudes toward technology, that don’t necessarily match the reality.

In first semester, 2003, 25 second year Communication Studies students at UWA were each offered the loan of a 20 Gigabyte iPod to aid them in the completion of digital media projects which formed a core part of their unit work. The idea of bringing a popular MP3 player into the classroom attracted the attention of both the national press, and the international computing community.

The justifications for this ranged from practical to pedagogical: it would solve problems of storage and portability, while exposing the students to both the reality and the complications of intellectual property, copyright, and the unreliable nature of Internet content.

Unexpectedly, this turned out to be an interesting experiment in assessing the attitude/expectations of students towards high-tech gadgetry in the classroom. A number of trends came to light concerning responsibility for expensive equipment, surprising gender differences in enthusiasm toward its use, network storage and legal issues over the downloading of music, insurance concerns, and attitudes towards ease/difficulty of use.

This paper will outline the ‘experiment’ from conception to completion, report on the results of a survey of students participating in the unit, and look at the experience in the context of the notion that students in a technological age expect and embrace technology as an integral part of excellence in education.

*“iPod, therefore they learn”, by Tracy Peacock, *The Australian*, March 12, 2003.