# Are Android Tablets the Next Big Thing in Education?

Posted on September 18, 2012by karen mahon

Last week I bought a new Galaxy Nexus 7. I couldn't help it. At $249 for a fully-loaded, 16 GB, 7-inch tablet running Android, I just had to find out what all the hype was about. The fact that it came with a $25 credit to be used in the Google Play Store didn't hurt.

I've been a big advocate of 1-1 iPad implementations for schools. I don't think I've made a secret of the fact that I think the opportunities for hardware producers are dropping dramatically as software takes over in education. As I've said in other posts, the flexibility and extensibility of the iPad makes it a great choice for schools. And I don't seem to be alone in that opinion, particularly as Apple sold twice as many iPads as laptops into schools in Q2 of this year.

I've also been spending a lot of time reviewing educational apps lately. With more than 20,000 of them in iTunes, I'm not running out of apps to review any time soon. And because I only have owned Apple devices, I haven't gone anywhere near Android apps. But when a friend got a Nexus 7 and was raving about it, I thought I'd better expand my horizons.

I was unnaturally excited when the Nexus box was delivered. And isn't the most frustrating part of getting a new tech toy the fact that you have to charge it before using it??

Once charged, I jumped in. The interface took some getting used to, as did the download process. It's not a carbon copy, certainly, of the iPad interface, so there's a bit of a ramp. But boy, this Nexus 7 is slick. I don't know if the graphics and resolution are as good as the iPad3, but with the 7″ size it really doesn't matter. The apps I ran on the Nexus 7 looked beautiful, sharp and bright. I was skeptical that the smaller size would be nice to use, but it was actually much easier to hold in one hand, while touching and swiping with the other, than the iPad. As my friend pointed out, and I tend to agree, using the Nexus 7 made the iPad seem positively bulky. And yes, I realize how completely crazy that sounds!

In checking out the Google Play Store, I found that there are more than 500,000 Android apps, about 30,000 of which are targeted at Education (this number does not include game apps that might still be appropriate for Education). I truthfully didn't realize that the number of Education apps for Android rivaled the number available for iOS. There still aren't very many apps that run on both platforms, so a school that is interested in a 1-1 tablet implementation still should choose one platform and stick to it….at least for the time being.

What I'd like to hear from you all is what you think it will take for schools to start considering Android tablets….the Nexus 7 being only one of them, of course, for their 1-1 implementation solutions? Clearly the Android tablets are a more economical solution. A 16 GB Nexus 7, as I said, is $249; a new 16 GB iPad 3 is $499 from the Apple Store. So my back of the envelope math says I can get about twice as many Nexus 7 devices as iPad 3 devices, bulk education discounts notwithstanding. And I'm not convinced that they are inferior to the iPads in any way, much less in ways that will be meaningful for every day classroom use (if you disagree, please educate me!). We know that smartphones running Android are outselling the iPhone and we know that Android is way outselling iOS in global markets.

So cast your vote….are Android tablets the "Next Big Thing" in education? Might this be the answer to getting 1-1 tablet implementations going twice as fast?

P.S. All bets are off, of course, once the iPad mini comes along….

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**About karen mahon**
i am a behavior and learning scientist. i hold an ed.d. in educational psychology and am trained as an instructional designer. i have spent more than 15 years working in education and instructional software design.

*What do you think of the camera? – Is it possible to to take pictures to use as visual supports for special education students on the fly? With only a front-facing camera,*

*this seems akward. I am a huge fan of the iPad for special needs, and have in the past been very staunch about iPad being the best educational option- Previously I had trialed a Motorola Xoom and liked many things about it, but the app options were so sparse in comparison at that time that iPad was the hands-down winner. However in the last six months or so I have noticed many wonderful app developers for iOS entering the Android Market – including developers making specialized communication and therapy apps. With the introduction of affordable tablets like the Nexus 7- with access to the full Google Play store- I find myself considering Android as a serious option for the special needs community.*

Reply

- [karen mahon](#) says:

[September 19, 2012 at 10:11 am](#)

Amy, quite right, using a front-facing camera isn't going to do the job easily. One of the things I like about the iPad is that with the backward-facing camera it can even be used in lieu of a document camera or visualizer. So definitely a good point in favor of the iPad, if you need kids to take pictures easily! And for SPED kids I can definitely appreciate how, just as one example, giving them the facility to take pictures of items for communication programs would be great! (When I worked in SPED we were still taking pictures and sticking them all on velcro in a communication book!)

*My brother has brought iPads into his Primary School (age 7-11 in the UK) and it's been interesting to learn about how successful it's been. My initial thought was along similar lines, why wouldn't you go for cheaper Android tablets, surely they do the same thing? A couple of reasons that I've heard against the Nexus is lack of camera (apparently this is useful in lessons) and lack of video out ( so teacher can output to a bigger screen).*

*Software? Well I think the Android app market will only get better. With the Nexus 7 arriving in India it will surely vastly outsell the iPad due to basic economics – ie it's cheaper! Sure, schools in the West might be able to afford iPads (and to be honest with*

*current educational budgets its probably a stretch) but in Asia and Africa cheaper options will be the only choice.*

*With business and charities both looking at how to extend education across the globe it seems clear to me that Android based devices will have a huge part to play. So the software will come as people look at how to bring universal education to Asia and Africa.*

*I'm not convinced Apple will release a 7″ iPad (and it almost certainly won't be called 'mini' – I think that brand's be used before!) and given that an iPod touch costs more than a Nexus 7 even if it does come along don't expect it to be cheap. But who knows maybe it's Apple's turn to play copy cat, but what a dent in their brand image if they follow the market rather than their design beliefs.*

Reply

- [karen mahon](#) says:

September 19, 2012 at 10:25 am

Jez- I think you're right that the lack of a backward-facing camera is an issue, as Amy said above as well, and video out is definitely nice to have as well. I'm not sure howmany teachers are currently using video out, even with the iPad, but my hope is thatmore and more of them will start using the iPad in lieu of the Interactive White Boardand take advantage of that option. And you know how these things go, if there's enoughdemand for those features then the Android tablets will add them.

I think you're right about the developing world. Backward-facing cameras and video out are unlikely to be a barrier to the Android devices being the products of choice. Everything I've seen suggests that those markets are likely to skip over tablets and focus mostly on phones, however. Do you agree, Jez?

The media here in the US is predicting an October release for the iPad "mini." I'm sure you are correct that "mini" won't be the real name. 😊And it will be very interesting to see if Apple copy cats!

*The tablets that came with styluses like the HTC Flyer & Galaxy Note tablet are encouraging, and android does have some advantages like better integration with google apps, but there still seem to be some limitations when compared with the ipad or with windows tablets.*

*I haven't found a good screencasting android app (like explain everything, showme, or screenchomp for android, or screencast-o-matic or jing for windows/mac). And I gotta admit airplay mirroring (wirelessly streaming your ipad screen to a projector or other screen) is a very nice feature for classroom instruction. Even windows can't do that, without expensive, bulky Widi (wireless hdmi) or whatever dongles, although there are some cheaper less bulky options coming out soon apparently (for both android and windows).*

*But for most of the stuff, there is not really much difference between the platforms (or there is a good alternative that works), especially when you try to stick to browser-based applications (like google docs, edmodo, socrative, etc.)*

2. [karen mahon](#) says:

Doug, all good points. I think it will be interesting to see how the Android tablets and software evolve. It seems that as they grow their customer base then they're likely to be in a better position to version the products in response to what the customer would like to see.

What do you think the chances are that the companies who make screenchomp or jing, for example, will start to build across platform? When I was working in the IWB field this was a huge issues....all of the hardware companies wanted to keep proprietary format and all of the software (i.e., lesson) companies wanted to be agnostic. It's still not been resolved by a truly functional set of interoperability standards. The closest they got was the old BECTA common file format that, unfortunately, didn't preserve functionality. What do you see in your crystal ball for this with tablets?