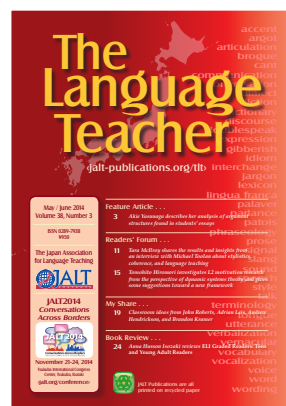


The Language Teacher

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Using iBooks Author to produce course material

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Tablets have become a common tool in many educational establishments as both a replacement and complement to existing PC-based technologies. At my chosen university, each student was required to purchase an iPad for use in class from the beginning of the 2013/2014 academic year. The decision to choose iPads over alternative tablet technology was based on the iPhone remaining the dominant smart phone in the Japanese market (Nagata, 2013) which suggested an existing familiarity with the operating system (OS) among the students. Recent publications have discussed a wide range of advantages offered when using tablets in tertiary education and include areas such as enhancing productivity, facilitating communication and collaboration (Park, 2011), “flexible and adaptive approaches to teaching” (Manuguerra, 2011, p. 61), and providing students with the ability to get “access to learning content, no matter where they are” (Meurant, 2010, p. 227). My own investigation identified advantages when using iPads for collaborative projects, and identified an inclusive group ethic compared to the previous situation involving PCs that often had the effect of dividing groups due to an obtrusive screen position (Brown, Castellano, Hughes, & Worth, 2012).

With the decision to move to tablet devices, the syllabus design team, of which I was a part, needed a system of design and delivery for course material, which had previously been largely paper-based. The university already had in place the Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) system; however, after attempting to use the system on an iPad, obvious problems emerged, including connectivity issues and a lack of interactivity. The existing material, when placed on Moodle, would often include text boxes in which the student would be required to write their own words; however, on an iPad it was not possible—although Moodle has recently seen developments toward further tablet compatibility—for students to edit Moodle-based material effectively. Delivering course handouts via PDFs also proved unsatisfactory for similar reasons and did not allow for the unique interactive touch screen features of the iPad to be utilized in an effective way.

Tablet technology has become a feature of many educational establishments and there are a number of available programs that allow for the creation of digital classroom material that can be used with this new technology. In this paper the author will discuss his own experience using iBooks Author to create digital handouts for his students for use on their iPads at a Japanese university. The author discusses the process for materials creation including how material is designed from scratch and delivered onto the students' iPads. The article will also outline the advantages and disadvantages of the application and how it might evolve in the future to suit specific contexts.

タブレットの技術は多くの教育施設で注目されるようになり、タブレットで使用可能な講義の電子資料が作成できるプログラムも多数存在する。本論では、日本の大学でiBooks Authorを使用し、学生向けにiPad用デジタル資料を作成した著者自身の経験を述べる。まず、どのようにして資料を一からデザインし、学生のiPadへ届けるか、その教材製作の過程を論じる。また、このアプリケーションの長所と短所を概略し、将来的にそれぞれ異なる学習用途に合わせて発展する可能性について述べる。

It was eventually decided to trial iBooks Author as a tool for designing and creating course handouts and the following article will review the process for (re)designing material, including the advantages and disadvantages that were experienced during the process. I have written this guide in a workflow format mirroring the process that I follow with each advantage and issue discussed for each design stage.

About iBooks Author

iBooks Author was launched in January 2012 as a tool for small publishers and educators to create their own work which could then be published through the iBooks store. The program is available as a free download and is designed to produce iBooks, which are essentially ebooks. The interface and available design tools are similar to other Apple programs such as Keynote and Pages and, as such, are relatively intuitive to use if familiar with Apple iOS. iBooks Author is represented graphically on the iPad as a traditional bookshelf, with each iBook positioned on the shelf facing outwards. This allows for material to be organized so that students can recognize and access material based on the cover design. The iBook's shelves can also hold additional PDFs or other material that are used as part of a course. Designed for Apple devices, iBooks Author makes full use of the interactivity afforded by the iPad through the use of widgets (the nature of which I shall explain in more detail below) and the ability to highlight text which can be accessed via the touch screen.

Stage 1: Creating material from templates

The course for which I was designing material consists of activities that last, on average, between two and three lessons. Each activity is represented via a handout, which the students use as support and instruction. My colleagues and I wanted to create short digital handouts of between three and four pages to replace the paper-based handouts currently in use whilst also altering the digital content to optimize the iPads touch screen. An editable version of an iBook is called an iBA (which stands for iBooks Author) and the completed, write-protected version is referred to simply as an iBook. The first stage of design with iBooks Author is the selection of a template from which to begin the design process (see Figure 1). The material that is subsequently produced can also be added to the list of templates offering up the opportunity to build sets of digital handouts.

This process was suitable for my syllabus which features a total of 6 units of differing themes that contain repeated activities represented by digital handouts. After material has been designed, it can then be easily altered to suit both learner needs and changes to topic themes when the activity is repeated, and in a shorter space of time than the initial design phase. An issue I found with the pre-loaded templates was the addition of sections that were deemed unnecessary for a handout, for example a self-generating table of contents, glossary, and introductory media page. These sections exist because iBooks Author is geared towards the creation of longer, book-length material. I considered the option of creating longer material, with all of the handouts for each activity combined in a single book; however, there is a danger that this option might impose linearity on the classroom situation when it is preferable for there to be an element of flexibility to allow for changes in the classroom and the learners' own needs. In particular, if all teaching material is typically generated in-house and topics are not necessarily pre-determined as is the case with my own syllabus. After a template has been selected, it is a relatively easy process to begin the design of the material. Text can be altered and pictures replaced with the designers own material by dragging or importing material from other sources. There is a wide variety of templates to choose from and some are more suitable than others. I initially tended to choose *Modern Type* (see Figure 1). However, once I had edited the template for my own lesson, and altered it substantially, I would always work from that material as a newly created template (see Figure 2).

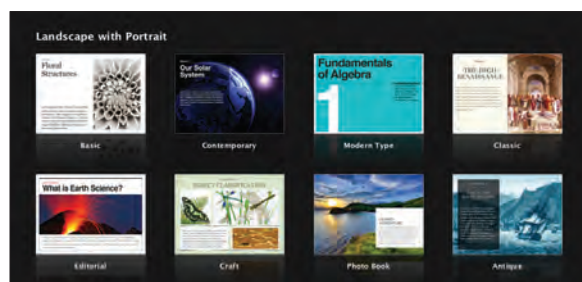


Figure 1. Pre-loaded templates on iBooks Author.

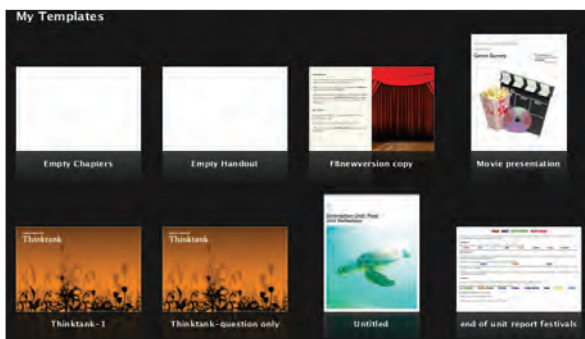


Figure 2. My own templates of edited digital handouts.

Stage 2: Using widgets for interactivity

What sets iBooks Author apart from other applications is the interactivity it affords both learners and material designers specifically working with iPads. The application is based around the use of widgets as a tool for design and these widgets can be utilized to add interactivity to the material. A widget is essentially a clickable icon which, in its most simplified form, is text that learners can interact with to enhance detail, receive instruction, access an application, and discover definitions of new vocabulary. A number of widgets are available with iBooks Author (see Figure 3) and new widgets are constantly being made available from the website Bookry <bookry.com>. The widgets provide opportunities to explain key concepts within a handout, such as the example in Figure 4, where I can add text to explain the tactile mode of communication to any student who requires extra support. The widgets free-up space for essential information and this makes the handouts shorter and more concise without removing that extra layer of support that some learners might require. The amount of widgets available can be disconcerting and many will have limited use in the language classroom, but ultimately the widgets provide a variety of tools from which to build material. It is worth noting that much of the content within *Bookry* is clearly beta and should be tested with the handouts before delivery to the students' iPads. In addition, I tended to primarily use the widgets provided by the iBooks Author application.



Figure 3. Examples of widgets preloaded with iBooks Author.

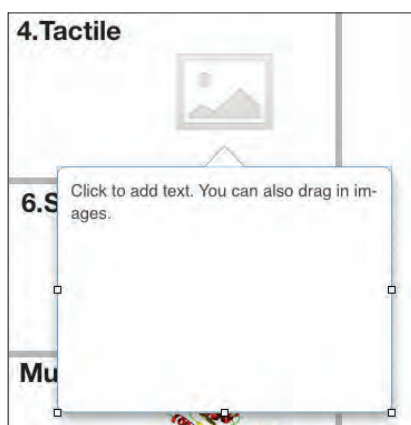


Figure 4. A widget being added to an IBA to explain the concept of *tactile*.

Stage 3: Delivery to the iPads

Once the material is complete, it can then either be published or exported. Publishing the material would make it available for the public via the iBooks Author store; this option is avoidable if the material is exported. Exporting the material essentially creates a file, which the teacher can then email to their students' iPads. I found it was possible for a handout to be emailed to my class during a lesson and all 20 students experienced no delay and were able to download and open it fairly quickly. It is worth noting that larger, book-sized files would obviously lead to a longer download time and would probably be ideally emailed before a class began. The digital handouts for each lesson are arranged on the students' bookshelf and separate bookshelves can be set up according to a topic being covered (see Figure 5).



Figure 5. iBooks shelf.

Each handout for the lessons is arranged on the iBookshelf on the student's iPad and separate bookshelves can be set up for different topics. The above shelf is for the *Popular culture: Movies* unit I taught.

The students select which handout they want to open and the material fills the screen. The students navigate the material by swiping from page to page (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. The digital handouts are navigated by swiping from page to page.

Stage 4: Students' interaction with the material

The students have a number of different ways in which to interact with the handout once it is downloaded onto their iPads. The learners can highlight vocabulary and add definitions, or meanings can be searched via the inbuilt dictionary. Designers can include questions and writing tasks within the material and the students can highlight that area of text and provide answers or submit writing (see Figure 7).

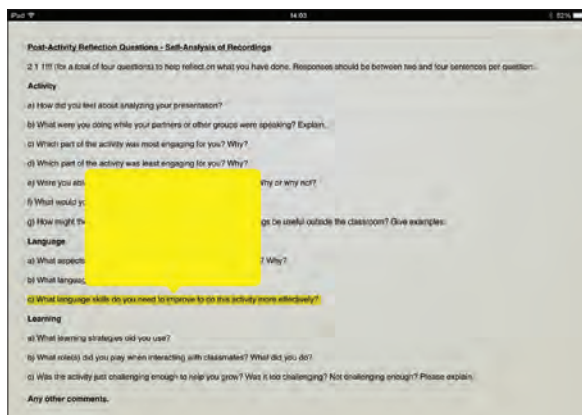


Figure 7. In this picture, a student has highlighted a question which can then be answered by typing into the box and emailed back to the teacher.

Unfortunately, important text within the widgets themselves in a digital handout cannot be highlighted, although students could add notes to an element alongside the widget to refer to information contained within. Any notes/work the student adds to the digital handout can be retrieved by tapping the top of the screen and selecting the note icon which stores every interaction that the student carries out on the handout in one place (see Figure 8).

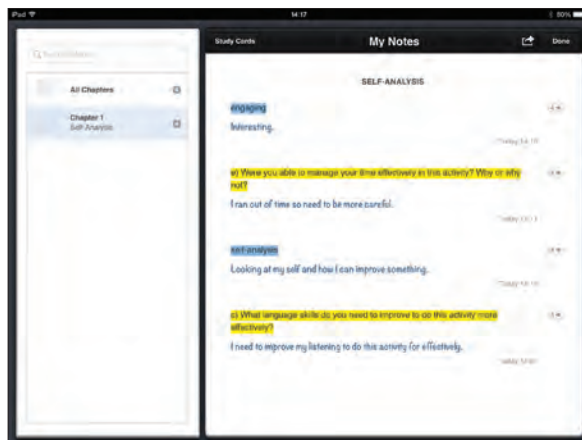


Figure 8. The iBook *My Notes* section containing text highlighted from the material (including the question from Figure 7). Note: This is a sample, not the student's work.

Work contained on digital handouts can also be emailed, along with the highlighted text, to the teacher. The curriculum developers suggested the students highlight words in different

colors to avoid confusion when sending material, for example blue for new vocabulary and yellow for question responses although the methods for organizing work on iPads eventually became something the students decided on individually.

Conclusion

iBooks Author provides a tool that allows for the simple creation of material which is both intuitive and constantly evolving. The tools the application provides, allows for the creation of personalized material that is full of possibility thanks to the dynamic widgets system. The primary concern the author has with the iBooks Author package is the motivation and expectations behind its creation. Although it was created with educators in mind, many of the features are not set up for the production of shorter material, which leads the author to the conclusion that iBooks Author is designed to support the creation of longer material, or digital text books. I was fortunate enough to have seen an entire digital textbook produced for an Italian language course and the longer format that iBooks Author is geared towards clearly complemented this style more than for shorter digital handouts, primarily because the automatically generated contents page allows for effective organization of content. It is possible to produce shorter material but the presence of elements more appropriate for an ebook (e.g., contents page, glossary) means that the design stage can feel cluttered and awkward especially when pages are referred to as chapters and sections.

Surprisingly, it is also difficult to create a completely blank template and my colleague was only able to do so by pasting white boxes onto an existing template to cover up parts of the preloaded templates and then designing on top of those elements. With my own syllabus eventually being rolled out to up to 20+ teachers (currently only 6 teachers teach the course) I worry that iBooks Author might prove to be too idiosyncratic and clunky for some teachers. In response to this concern, the curriculum designers have considered making multiple formats available (e.g., PDF copies, Moodle-based copies, Google sites) to satisfy multiple agents. It is possible that a future incarnation of iBooks Author may change the way in which the program can be used. A positive change would be options for shorter material and blank templates. As a result, it is difficult to recommend iBooks Author as a definitive solution to the issue of producing digital handouts, particularly at a larger institu-

tion, although it remains a powerful tool that continues to offer exciting design possibilities.

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