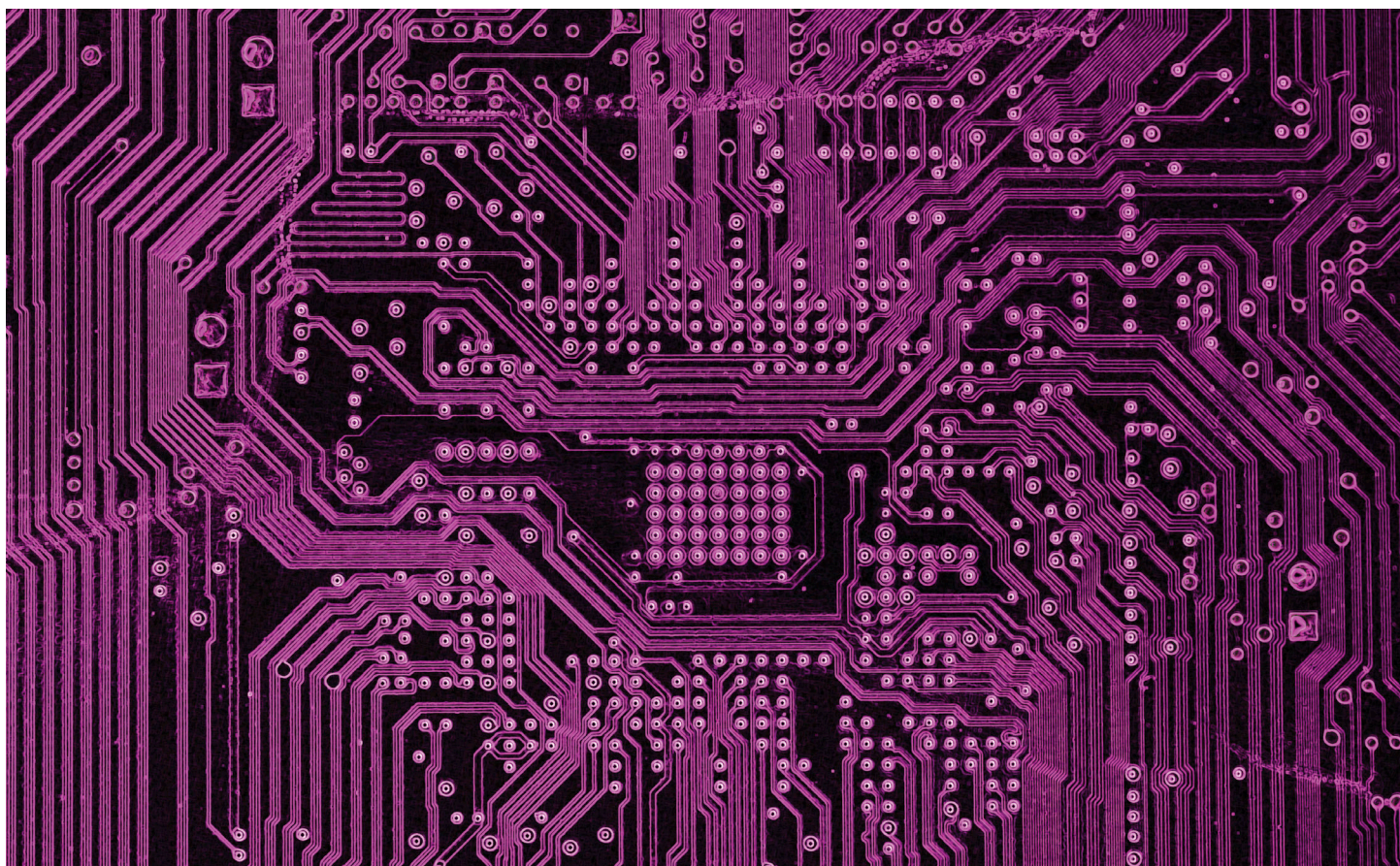# Confessions of an IT Manager

*Doug Loader*



It is clear that our students are moving into a workforce that is both unpredictable and precarious. With constant reminders that computers and automation will replace many jobs, we are being urged to 'teach differently'. Schools are being challenged to create young minds that are rich in interpersonal skills, minds that are creative, collaborative, and above all, resilient.

What does this mean, and how can we achieve these objectives while addressing the needs of the curriculum?

I believe the answers are to be found among some of the most forward-thinking practitioners of our time. The sort of people that create amazing products that transform our lives. Often, they work in organisations that are celebrated for practicing modern project management techniques, such as Agile, which rewards employees who are dynamic and flexible because the company requires critical minds that challenge the standard.

Steve Jobs was caught off guard in 2010 in an interview by *New York Times* journalist Nick Bilton.

> *When technology is implemented without the correct technical infrastructure and teacher training, the overall impact can be counter-productive*

Bilton asked: "So, your kids must love the iPad?". Jobs responded, "They haven't used it… we limit how much technology our kids use at home." And it seems that many staff at tech companies share this cautious approach. Chris Anderson, a former editor at *Wired Magazine* is outspoken about the strict time limits that he puts in place with his five children.

Psychologist and author Adam Alter recently spoke at TED and revealed that 75% of children that attend the Waldorf School of the Peninsula in Silicon Valley have parents that work at tech companies. A Waldorf school is similar to a Steiner school in that its pedagogy emphasises the role of play and imagination in learning. So why do these highly regarded innovators choose a school that does not introduce screens until Year 8? From my personal experience of working in education the answer is obvious.

When technology is implemented without the correct technical infrastructure and teacher training, the overall impact can be counter-productive. I know this because at my secondary school, I feel that we are correcting a social imbalance with our iPad program. Where the device was first seen as a learning aid it is often now treated as a personal entertainment device; a device which some teachers are beginning to loathe.

I have worked with many primary schools in WA that have chosen to seek the rewards that personal computers can bring. But many Year 7 students arrive at my school with two- or three-year-old devices that are loaded with games, social media apps and a plethora of unnecessary distractions and unhealthy social habits.

When the NSSCF funding dried up, secondary schools looked for new ways to maintain a one-to-one device program, on a budget. I certainly did, and one solution was to add the iPad to the school booklist. This means

ict

*I'm not saying that digital gaming and online social networking do not have a place in learning. Most mature students will still have access to these mediums via their own personal devices, and this is where they should stay*

that it is compulsory for each student to have a family funded iPad. It now seems that more and more primary schools are following this trend, and it concerns me that the programs are not being properly managed.

Technology is not a requirement for critical thinking skills, collaboration, or indeed creativity. When incorporating technology into your school, boundaries must be imposed, especially for primary school use. I know that many of my teaching colleagues would prefer that iPads be less 'personal device' and more 'learning device'.

I think it is time for Australian schools to carefully review their management of technology in primary and secondary education, especially those that have a 'family funded' model, which sometimes means 'family managed'. It's all very well providing a list of required apps, but perhaps what is required is a list of un-required apps? And whose duty is it to manage other media content on the device?

**Empower both parents and teachers (and students)**

If you decide to create a one-to-one iPad environment, especially in a primary setting, I suggest that you manage your iPads with Apple School Manager. And if you are considering iPads for younger students, you'll be pleased to learn that you can now set-up a shared iPad environment, so not only are your iPads configured for learning, but you can also have multiple students sharing the same device.

Apple School Manager is a web based portal that enables IT administrators to manage devices, users and content. At set-up, students and staff are given managed Apple IDs, including

students under the age of 13.

A read of the documentation (https://www. apple.com/education/it/) illustrates that Apple encourages the use of device management in schools via Apple School Manager. This message should be a welcome one for schools. In the long run, an iPad program without this technical foundation could be problematic.

The system can import student names and class groups from your school's student management software but if this is an issue, it is easy to bulk upload your students' records.

Apple School Manager also enables the Apple Classroom app which directly empowers teachers in the classroom. Teachers can lock iPad screens to certain apps, or lock an iPad so it cannot be used and can also remotely monitor a student's iPad.

These are incredibly powerful features but what schools will find is that teachers will not need to use them. Once a student realises that the teacher has control, they will simply focus on the task at hand and not attempt to test the patience of their tutor.

All apps and documents can be distributed centrally using a combination of Apple Configurator 2 and Apple School Manager. And with the ability to enable restrictions, a school can remove the option for students to add apps. This simple school policy change will have a profound effect on technology use, effectively

making the iPad a tool for learning; not socialising, not gaming… squarely for learning.

The partnership between Apple Configurator 2 and Apple School Manager can be expanded with a third-party Mobile Device Management (MDM) solution. This allows for remote management of your iPad fleet. But for small fleets, you can achieve the basics on a tight budget with Apple's free software solutions.

I'm not saying that digital gaming and online social networking do not have a place in learning. Most mature students will still have access to these mediums via their own personal devices, and this is where they should stay. But in the primary school setting, digital gaming and online socialising should be carefully managed.

A trial of 'locked down' devices at my school has been well received; students themselves are telling us that they want assistance when it comes to self-regulation and time management.

From a primary school perspective, unless you are going to utilise device management techniques such as Apple provides, I would suggest that a one-to-one environment be re-thought because teachers need to guide and conduct how students learn, and parents need to know that your technology program is conducive to education.

ET