

BYOD lessons made easy

Stile Education offers non-technical teachers an easy-to-use way to build lessons for digital learners

Bill Minnis

The screenshot shows the Stile Education platform. At the top, there's a toolbar with icons for Text, Files and media, Sketchpad, YouTube, Table, Multiple choice, Mind map, Student upload, Project space (marked as new), and Graph. To the right of these is a 'Text' section with a description and two buttons: 'Add text' and 'Ask written-answer question'. Below this is a 'Science' lesson page showing a grid of student submissions for an activity titled 'Year 7: Gravity - Activity 3'. The grid includes columns for Year, Name, and Activity 1 through Activity 5. Each submission has a status icon and a preview link. On the right side of the lesson page, there's a specific question titled 'Question 3' asking students to draw arrows indicating the force of gravity between the Moon and the Earth. A sample student submission is shown with a red arrow pointing from the Earth to the Moon.

Quted in an article headed *School computers ‘misguided’* [The Australian 11.2.14 p.5], Finnish teacher and digital publisher Heikki Karjalainen claimed that the focus of school computer programs is misplaced, concentrating on putting a computer in front of every student but failing to provide the content that teachers could use in class.

He said: “Teachers are expected to create all of the content by themselves in the afternoon, that’s why we don’t get the best use of technology in our schools.”

Sounds familiar? Australian teachers are struggling to come to terms with how to use the potential of ICT to create lessons that will engage students. When the first interactive whiteboards arrived in the classroom, they were hailed as the future of learning – placing the knowledge of the world within reach. But the reality hasn’t quite matched up to the hype.

In this issue of *Education Today* (pp. 30), Doug Loader, who heads ICT at his school in WA writes that in 2014 his school is installing

70” flat panel monitors for wireless projection of iPads and laptops “...because our teachers were not using the interactive component of the whiteboard. The setup and preparation time also outweighed the educational outcomes of the task.”

So IWBs are fading, the *Digital Education Revolution* was good while the funds kept coming and now it’s the turn of BYOD... three waves of technology in schools in the space of a few years. Yet little has been done to address the core issue: How can teachers with limited IT skills prepare engaging lessons for students to study on their assorted iPads, tablets, iMacs, laptops, chromebooks and smartphones?

CEO Byron Scaf believes that Stile Education has the answer. Launched in September last year, cloud-based Stile provides the classroom teacher with a simple, intuitive way of developing interactive lessons that will run on any device, anytime, anywhere.

He emphasises that Stile was designed to help teachers focus on the learning, not the technology. He says: “Previous attempts to

develop lesson preparation software for schools were based on big tertiary systems, but they didn’t really work at the school level because very few teachers had the necessary time or technical know-how.

“Given this, we set out to develop a system that is quick to learn and doesn’t require any specialist IT knowledge. Any teacher with basic word processing skills can build a lesson in Stile.”

There are four parts:

- The teacher plans and builds the lesson
- Students explore and respond to the lesson
- The teacher reviews student progress
- Students reflect on the teacher’s feedback

The process starts with the teacher choosing what is required – it could be a class test, the outline for a project or the basis of a group discussion. Using a Stile template and palette of tools the lesson is prepared step-by-step. Any desired combination of items can be included – questions, explanatory text, files and media, Sketchpad, YouTube clips, a teacher-created video, table, multiple-choice list or maybe a mind map. And it’s all very flexible, while

The image shows a composite of three screenshots from the Stile software interface. The top left screenshot displays a video player with a satellite orbiting Earth, labeled 'Source: TedEd'. Below it is a question card for 'Question 7' asking about the meaning of 'orbit'. The bottom left screenshot features a magazine cover for 'COSMOS' with the title 'SPARE PARTS' and a woman's torso showing internal organs. The right side of the image contains two more question cards: 'Question 7' and 'Question 8', both related to orbits. The rightmost screenshot shows a digital drawing tool where a student has drawn a red arrow pointing from the Earth to the Moon to indicate gravitational force.

developing the lesson, the teacher can look in test mode at what the student will see and can re-order the sequence, add to or delete items.

Valuable as Stile is in the conventional 'classroom lesson and home study', it shines in the flipped classroom, making available prescribed foundation material to be covered at home so that class time can be used to consolidate concepts and expand students' understanding.

The Mark Book function gives teachers a real-time picture of the class as a group and individually. At any point, the teacher can see where each student has got to, who is falling behind and needs help and who is racing ahead and needs more challenges.

As soon as the student finishes a lesson, a single click sends it to the teacher for review... another click and it's back with the teacher's comments, so feedback is almost immediate and continuous.

Students begin building a digital portfolio

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of their work from the first time that they use Stile. Over time, a complete record of their work is built up so they can go back to review lessons, past submissions and results. There's a collaborative learning and discussion function too, enabling students to work together on a project or contribute to a discussion outside school hours.

Costing \$30 per student per year, using Stile couldn't be simpler. Access is through the student's or teacher's school password and there's no need for the class teacher to head off to the ICT staff to create a new student account.

There are no upload or download limits and generous workspace allows every lesson the

teacher has prepared and all of the student's work to be stored forever. For schools and teachers this means that, over time, a library of lessons can be built up, stored, modified and shared with colleagues.

Dale Sheppard, Curriculum Coordinator at St Joseph's Ferntree Gully, Melbourne, is a convinced Stile user. His school has a student body of 900 and more than 100 staff. He says: "St Joseph's is an iPad school. I was looking for a solution that would help our teachers get more out of the iPads when I found Stile."

"We took it on a six months trial in June last year and there would have been teachers' riot if we had tried to give it back. Most teachers needed as little as 30 minutes instruction to become proficient in building lessons."

"Since we started, teachers' conversations have swing around from 'how do I?' to 'How can I use Stile to improve my lessons?'

Currently, more than 30 schools, with 10,000 students are using Stile. **ET**

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