# iPad And Mr. Bean
## -Seigakuin University Presentation-

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Notes from my presentation at Seigakuin University, December 2016, detailing 3 key areas in my research at Seigakuin Primary School: iPad, Mr. Bean and programming.

## iPad

iPad applications have a surprisingly short life span. As the OS is incrementally upgraded over the years (now version 10) and new features are added and discarded, app developers (like myself) have to work hard in maintaining compatibility while avoiding bugs and crashes.

Due to this fact, the apps I use and how I use them have been part of a bumpy journey that's in constant flux in which I'm finding that I usually can't use a teaching method for more than 2 or 3 years in a row (on the flip side, I still have paper flash cards I used a decade ago). I'll be demonstrating some key apps I've been using in 2016.

> Grades 1 – 2
> "Dress up" by Sago Mini. iOS Free.
> "Mapcap's Plane" by Dumb Ways JR. iOS 240 yen.
>
> Grades 3 – 4
> "Hair Salon" by Toca Boca. iOS 400 yen.
> "Robot party" by Sago Mini. iOS 360 yen.
>
> Grades 5 – 6
> "Ocean Swimmer" by Sago Mini. iOS 360 yen.

Most apps labeled as promoting a child's education are suitable only for 1 on 1 interaction, i.e., giving the child an iPad and allowing them to figure out a problem. When a teacher is holding an iPad connected to the classroom screen while trying to induce 40 children to verbalise their thoughts into English, the 'putting a triangle shape into a triangle hole' kind of one–answer–only app falls flat.

If, on the other hand, the main character of the app is allowed to do what they want (fly around a world, build an object, etc) where there is no correct answer, it leaves the door open for the teacher's imagination and students' energy and interest to fill the gaps. All the apps I've chosen above follow this formulae. The older the child, the freer the main character in the app, can be.

As an example, the 'Ocean swimmer' app for grades 5 an 6 has a fish main character who has complete freedom to swim around an ocean, around a sunken ship, in a cave to get some gold, jump out of the water to scare a boat, etc. So, instead of just repeating what the teacher says (Let's go right, it's a tree!, where is the candy?) as in the early grades, students are encouraged to answer questions (Where do you want to go? Why? Are you sure?).

## Mr. Bean

The thought of showing a Mr. Bean video (sans English, naturally) seemed far from the most ideal material for a lesson but after a brief experiment and some tweaking, it has turned out to be a surprisingly affective (and very popular) English teaching tool.

To prepare, I take a 5 minute, thoroughly amusing

Mr. Bean skit from Youtube (whatever the skit, howls of laughter are assured) and create a worksheet with 2 sections: 6 true/false statements and 12 events that happened during the video but listed in the incorrect chronological order. The lesson plays out as follows:

1. 10 minutes: Go through the w/s explaining words and meanings while encouraging students to write Japanese above words to aid comprehension.
2. 5 minutes: Watch the video (1 st time).
3. 15 minutes: The students do the w/s in pairs or in groups.
4. 5 minutes: Watch the video (2 nd time).
5. 5 minutes: Give the correct answers.

Grade 5 simply don't have the grammatical tools to easily understand the w/s so this is very much a grade 6 activity.

## Programming

With the availability of an iPad to all students from grade 4 and above, the opportunity for students to be working by themselves to produce something unique using English, presents itself. This is balanced by the unfortunate reality that when you put an iPad in their little hands, silence prevails.

ScratchJr (scratchjr.org) is a high level, animation based programming language that uses no code whatsoever. In fact, you don't even need to use the keyboard to build an animation (aka program or app), you just drag and drop functionary into a certain order and press 'Go'. Grade 4 students have been able to produce attractive animations with frightening ease.

With this in mind, I presented the students with a simple dialog of a customer in a shop. The following is a snippet:

A   What colour would you like?
B   I would like blue.
A   Here you are. Please try it on.
B   Can I use the fitting room?

We spent 2 lessons preparing practicing the dialog, building animations (with speech bubbles) and presenting their work to the rest of the class.

I hope to develop this idea and present my findings at a latter date but my initial impressions are, in it's current form, that it's an unsatisfactory vehicle for English learning. The enjoyment and commitment of the students creating an animation while using the target language was there but most of the time I was confronted with a silent class tapping on iPad screens – a lesson style I'm very keen at avoiding at all costs.

But, it's hard to avoid the fact that they loved the creation aspect as they sunk into their own worlds. My focus will now be trying to reduce the chasm between aural exercise and the pull of technology.

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