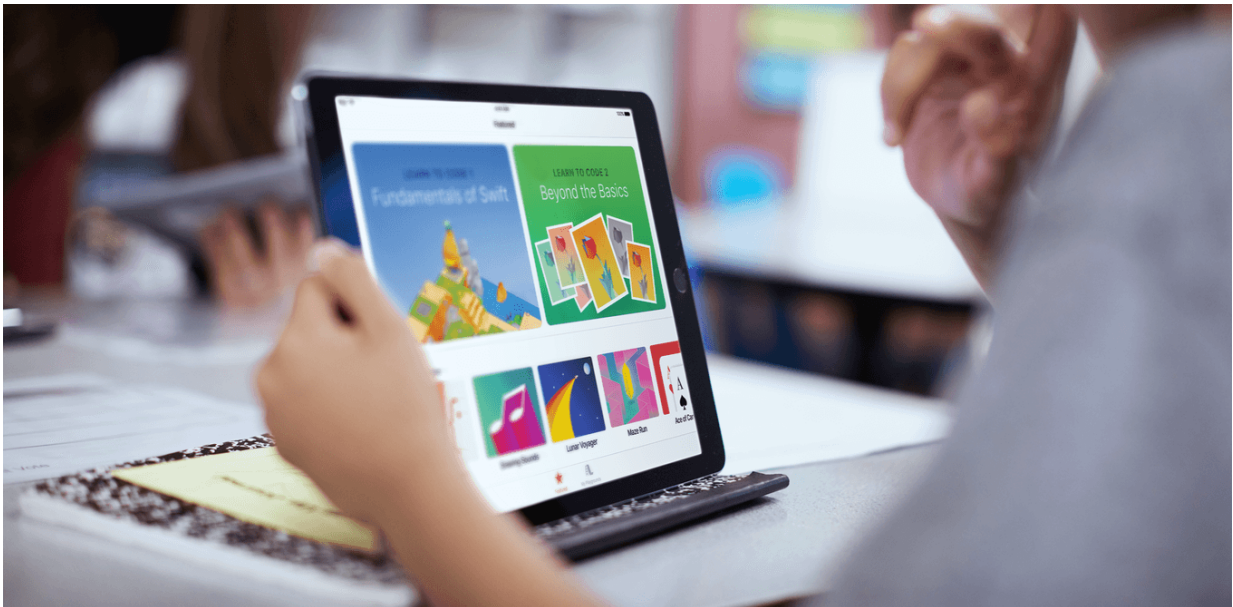


# Apple is taking its first steps towards a more comprehensive post-PC world

July 22 2016, by Michael Cowling

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Apple-developed lessons help students learn to code on the same device the code will be used on. Credit: Apple

Hands up if you've heard of Swift Playgrounds? No, it's not some new start-up providing quick playdates for bedraggled parents, although that might be interesting.

Swift Playgrounds is the new [programming tool](#), introduced by Apple in June at its annual [Worldwide Developer Conference](#), based on the Swift

[programming language](#) the company introduced a few years ago.

What makes Swift Playgrounds interesting is that it provides a first-party computer programming platform that can be run entirely on an iPad, no computer required.

While Apple has been slowly [adding features](#) to the iPad over the past few years, this represents a pretty significant step change for Apple.

It means the company is starting to acknowledge that these machines – famously called [post-PC devices](#) by the late Apple CEO Steve Jobs – are now powerful enough to be used to write apps for use on the same device.

That means it may not be long before these devices can be used totally without a personal computer for everything, from writing content to developing apps.

## **They might be Swift, but they're not the first**

Of course, Apple is not the first company to launch programming tools for the iPad.

Universities such as MIT have been developing tools such as the [Scratch visual programming language](#) for the iPad for a number of years. This gives primary school and middle school students a platform to develop their own games.

But what makes Swift Playgrounds significant is that in using the same programming language as iPad apps themselves are developed in, [Swift](#), it gives insight into a future where iPad apps could be written on iPad themselves, and published from that same location.

It's not a great stretch to envision a future where digital natives could potentially develop and run totally new apps using only post-PC devices. They would never have to touch a personal computer for anything at all.

Not surprisingly, Steve Jobs, ever the visionary, predicted this possibility back in 2008 in an interview with Apple journalist Walt Mossberg at the D8 conference. At D8, Jobs described a future where he likened iPads to cars, usable by the majority of people, and PCs to trucks, required by only those with specialised needs.

With the introduction of Swift Playgrounds, Apple is acknowledging that more and more users only need a car, and that perhaps trucks are becoming more and more rare.

## **Moving between digital devices**

This change is a good thing, because [research work](#) I conducted with colleagues at Central Queensland University shows that while many of our students, regardless of their age, are comfortable with technology, they are not as comfortable with changing between devices.

Specifically, our work found that digital competencies do not transfer well between devices. Their comfort with one device does not translate to comfort with another.

The introduction of Swift Playgrounds and the potential for app development on iOS devices suggests that this preference will eventually be catered for, which is a good thing given our findings.

Perhaps we are finally pushing towards a world of truly pervasive computing. Rather than being locked behind a desk for some tasks, or finding ourselves desperately missing the keyboard we left at home, we are able to use whatever computing device we have at hand to complete

whatever task we need to complete.

After all, as long as the device has the right buttons and the right inputs, then why not be able to use it for anything we need to do with it?

What's more, why don't we make it so that our progress on tasks transfers seamlessly between devices? That way we can pick up any [device](#) and simply continue with the work that we started earlier.

Ben Thompson, of Stratechery, called this concept [Continuous Computing](#) back in 2015 when he envisioned a world where we move seamlessly between devices to get our work done.

Apple's announcements at WWDC this year certainly indicate this is the direction they are heading. This should be applauded and I am hopeful for our digital native students.

While we can't stop them from having an iPhone or an iPad continuously in their hand, it's good to know we are working towards a world where they can drive these devices confidently to do what they need, moving seamlessly between devices as the need arises. They don't need to find themselves behind the wheel of an unfamiliar truck-style PC.

Which raises the question, what will other tech giants such as Google and Microsoft do now to catch up and avoid being left behind in any post-PC world? After all, more safe post-PC driving can only be a good thing!

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