iPad in Education:

Evaluating Apps for the Classroom

Overview

iPad apps are expanding the learning experience both inside and outside the classroom, making it more interactive, immersive, and engaging. And we know that when students are more engaged, they are more motivated, and they perform better. With so many amazing education apps available—and more being developed all the time—there's no limit to the exciting possibilities for learning.

Tens of thousands of education apps on the App Store cover everything from math and science to foreign languages and reading. Students can manipulate math equations using just a finger. They can browse an interactive periodic table of elements. They can even dissect a virtual frog in one class, then flip through the world's greatest collection of art in the next. And teachers can deliver engaging lessons, monitor progress, get immediate feedback on students, and stay organized.

Getting Started

If you're just getting started teaching with apps, it's helpful to begin by setting goals for student learning. What must students understand? What should their interaction with apps look like? And which apps would work best for your specific lesson plans? You may find that choosing an app is easier after carefully considering what you want students to do with it, and why.

You might begin by exploring questions like:

- What parts of your lesson plans are you particularly passionate about? How could you best communicate that enthusiasm to students?
- Where do your students encounter roadblocks around a topic or lesson? What might help them get over these hurdles?
- What concepts or activities would you like to cover but don't have enough time? Can they be taught more efficiently or combined with others?
- What are the opportunities to gain insights into student learning through the content they create with apps?

The answers to these questions and the content in this guide can help as you begin to explore, choose, and integrate iOS apps into your classroom.

Selecting Apps

On the following pages are five key considerations and some questions to ask yourself as you explore, evaluate, and select education apps.

Developmental appropriateness

An app can be effective as a teaching tool only if the content is appropriate for the target age. In determining whether an app is developmentally appropriate, consider:

- Cognitive skills
- Language skills
- Physical skills
- Social skills

Featured App

BrainPOP Featured Movie by BrainPOP

BrainPOP Featured Movie showcases original, high-quality, animated educational videos organized by a broad range of subjects, from language arts and history to science and technology. The videos entertain viewers while also effectively illustrating concepts. With a new video each day, students can examine hundreds of topics and be quizzed to assess and track comprehension. The app also recommends related videos and content to explore.

More to Explore

Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood: Play at Home with Daniel by PBS KIDS

Leveled perfectly for young students to learn about everyday experiences.

Dragon Box Algebra 12+ by WeWantToKnow AS

Game-based learning introduces a new level of fun to mathematics, accommodating students with varying skill levels.

Incredible Numbers by Professor Ian Stewart, by Touch Press

Advanced math concepts are made relatable to a general audience.

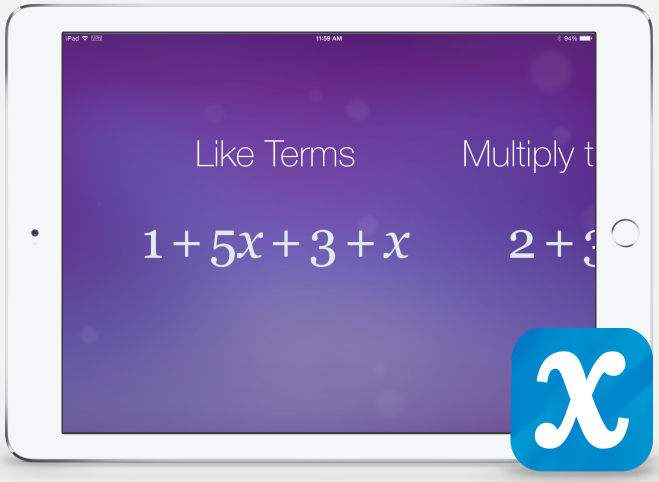
Instructional design

Apps can help transform the classroom, offering teachers flexible instruction methods and students customizable learning experiences. In evaluating whether an app's design meets your learning goals, you might consider:

- Does it effectively communicate its subject matter?
- Does it align to your learning goals?
- Does it provide scaffolded learning support, feedback, assessment, and reflection?
- Can it help students learn within context and make real-world connections?
- Does it offer personalized or adaptive skill levels?

Featured App

Algebra Touch by Regular Berry Software LLC
Algebra Touch helps students master key concepts by touching and dragging numbers to create and solve equations, keeping them actively engaged in the problem-solving through their movement. Algebra Touch provides well-sequenced, scaffolded lessons and practice problems that cover factorization, simplification, order of operations, prime numbers, and more.



More to Explore

Teachley: Addimal Adventure by Teachley
Builds understanding of math strategies using interactive features; supports learning with a virtual tutor.

iNaturalist by iNaturalist, LLC
Connects learning with the real world and provides feedback on findings from a community of scientists.

Duolingo - Learn Languages for Free by Duolingo
Learn languages with this research-based methodology for teaching Spanish, French, Portuguese, Italian, and English.

Engagement and motivation

As a teacher, you know what happens when students are deeply engaged. The classroom comes alive and motivation and retention are improved. Apps can help create an environment that keeps students engaged and motivated. You might consider these questions when determining whether an app meets your criteria for engagement and motivation:

- Is it inviting and intuitive to use?
- Is it at the right skill level, with room to grow?
- Will students return to it often?
- Are learning features innovative, with more than just rote activities?
- Does it incorporate gaming principles?

Featured App

SAT Vocab by MindSnacks

MindSnacks uses games to build essential vocabulary, with quests and challenges that keep players coming back. Before they know it, players have a reached a new high score, all while mastering new words. The personalized learning algorithms keep the skill level just right. Players can track their progress, review new and old words, and have fun.

More to Explore

Poptropica by Pearson Education, Inc.
Learn through exploration. Maximize critical thinking skills while navigating engaging stories on each island.

Slice Fractions by Ululab
An innovative and engaging approach to integrating puzzles and mathematics.

Timeline Civil War by Ballista
Brings history to life with interactive features and a beautiful design.

Balance of interactive features

Apps can incorporate many types of interactive features that may or may not enhance learning. Consider the following when evaluating an app's interactive features:

- Are they enhancing learning or are they just for fun?
- Is there an appropriate balance between having enough interactivity, but not so much that it distracts from learning?
- Do the interactive features take advantage of iOS capabilities to elevate the learning experience?

Featured App

Stephen Hawking's Snapshots of the Universe by Random House, LLC

Through interactive experiments, this app makes learning the principles that control our universe relatable and understandable—even for younger grades. Students can drop objects with Galileo to learn about gravity, explore space travel by piloting a ship from Earth to Mars, and more. Interactive features not only engage students, but also demonstrate concepts and enhance learning in ways that traditional methods can't.

More to Explore

The Human Body by TinyBop, Inc.
The innovative, engaging cause-and-effect interactives in this app foster curiosity and deepen understanding.

Froguts Frog Dissection for HD iPad by Froguts
Realistic and in-depth interactives let students experience dissection like never before.

Explore Shakespeare by Cambridge University Press
Visual word clouds, timelines, and photos, along with professional audio and text analyses tap into different modes of learning.

Accessibility

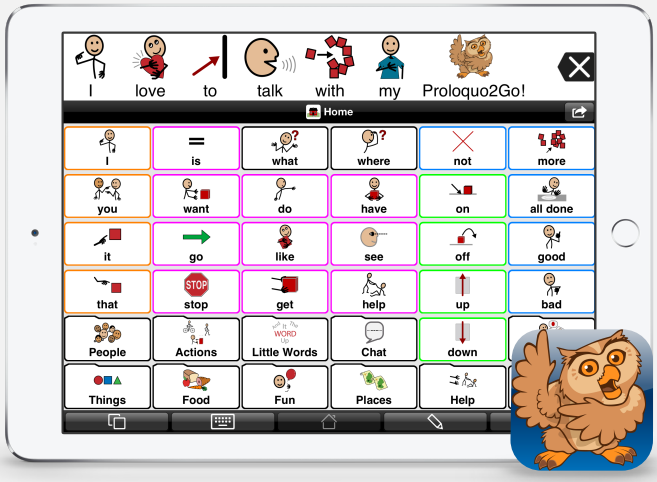
In addition to the accessibility features built into iOS, many apps can help reach students with special learning needs. In evaluating such apps, consider:

- Does the app include a range of levels for a variety of users with differing skill levels?
- Does the app support multiple learning modalities?
- Does the app let users personalize the user interface?
- Does the app take advantage of features such as VoiceOver or closed captioning?

Featured App

Proloquo2Go by AssistiveWare

Proloquo2Go helps students with speech difficulties communicate using a natural-sounding text-to-speech system and a comprehensive library of over 14,000 words, symbols, and conjugations. Learners at all skill levels can take advantage of the rich library of words to express themselves more precisely. The app supports a range of language skill levels with a customizable interface to meet the needs of multiple users. To make communication more efficient and natural, the app supports core and basic vocabulary groupings, advanced word prediction, and vocabulary customization.



More to Explore

The Social Express II, by Language Express, Inc.
A special education app that teaches children and young adults how to navigate social situations with animated interactive lessons.

Question Builder by Mobile Education Store LLC
A reading comprehension app to help elementary-aged children learn to answer abstract questions based on inference.

GarageBand by Apple
This VoiceOver-compatible app lets students produce podcasts, record songs, or learn to play an instrument.

Enjoy the Adventure

Now that you have an idea of what to consider when choosing apps, where do you start? How do you find apps that are developmentally appropriate and will keep students engaged? Which apps will meet your learning goals, keep your classroom motivated, and reach every type of learner?

One great place to start is right in the App Store. The handpicked, subject-focused Education Collections cover a wide range of subjects for a variety of levels and learning styles. Discover iMovie, GarageBand, Pages, Numbers, and Keynote—free creativity apps from Apple that let students do amazing things with movies, music, documents, spreadsheets, and presentations. And plenty of third-party content creation apps, such as Explain Everything, Puppet Pals, and Stop Motion Studio, can help students communicate thinking and learning in new ways.

It's an exciting time of innovation in learning. We're seeing apps that provide engaging, Multi-Touch, rich experiences that were never before possible. Have fun exploring the amazing world of education apps.

More to Explore

Apps for Every Grade

For the Classroom

Master Your Major

Teacher's Starter Kit

Homework Projects

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