

10 Tablet Apps to Change Your Classroom

Struggling to decide exactly what's worth downloading to your device?

Dave Foord can help...



Education is currently undergoing one of the most dramatic transformations ever, thanks to the usability and popularity of tablet devices such as the iPad, Android tablets, and Microsoft's recent entry, the Surface. The small size, rapid fire up time, and portability of these devices make them an ideal educational tool, where the technology works around the teaching and learning rather than teaching and learning having to bend around the technology.

Some schools are investing in 1:1 deployments of such devices, others are recognising their potential use as a teacher-only tool; either way, schools have to think carefully about which apps to deploy, and how to go about selecting the 'right' ones from the thousands that are available. Below are some considerations to bear in mind:

Paid or Free?

Many assume that paid for apps are better than free ones, which is often the case, but not always. The most successful apps are the ones that are very cheap (often less than £1), as people will happily download them knowing that even if the app isn't used it has only cost them £1 – however when using this model in education, if you have hundreds of devices, these cheap downloads soon become very expensive.

Free apps are great because you can happily download them and if they don't do what you want you simply delete them. The key in education is thinking about *why* the app has been produced. Some are created by organisations as part of their service, so are great to use. Others make their money from the advertising that comes with the app. In some cases this is not a problem, just a small bar at the bottom, or an advert that pops up on first opening, but other apps have less desirable advertising, e.g. gambling sites; claims you have won a prize but the link takes you to a malicious site; and some contain a link to

a premium rate phone number, which can be easily clicked by accident and then costs a lot of money in phone charges. When I assess apps for schools, I quickly dismiss any apps with this style of advertising.

Another way that firms make money is by providing an app for free, but only allowing partial use of its functionality until you subscribe to its system, which then unlocks the full functionality. This doesn't work well in education as it often becomes very expensive very quickly, you lose the benefits of reduced prices through volume purchasing, and the mechanism of simply paying for the subscription isn't straight forward.

Teacher or Learner?

Traditionally in education, technology has been tutor-centred, where the teacher has control over what the learner can and cannot do, and he or she creates resources and content for the learners to access. The power of the tablet is realised when the learners use it to create their own content and materials as this becomes a powerful form of revision, encourages higher order thinking skills, is active learning, and allows the individual learner to use the tools and techniques that work best for him or her.

When assessing apps, we need to look at them for their potential as a teaching tool, and their potential as a learning tool; the ones that do both well are more desirable than ones that do one or the other.

Specialist or General?

Some apps are specific to a particular subject or a specialist topic within a subject, others are general apps that can be used across wide areas of the curriculum. Specialist apps have the advantage of meeting that small area of curriculum very well, but having lots of them can become expensive and time consuming.

General apps have the advantage of doing many jobs across wide parts of the curriculum, so teachers and learners will get the opportunity to use them on many occasions and thus will learn how to employ them to their maximum potential.

Some specialist apps, although designed for one purpose can actually be used for another. For example, Ubersense is a free sports analysis app, which allows you to video an action and then play it back slowly and annotate it. Although designed for sport, this app can be used effectively in areas such as dance, or chemistry when reactions are so rapid they are 'missed', or in any subjects where the learners have to do presentations and you want to feedback on the relevant skills.

To get you started, I've chosen 10 great apps designed for the iPad. Just type the product name into a search engine to find out more. Many of them will have versions for other operating systems; if not, then similar apps can generally be sourced.

1 EXPLAIN EVERYTHING (P,T,L,G)

This app turns the iPad into an interactive whiteboard, and then allows for videos (including audio) to be captured as a concept is explained using the app. This can be used for impromptu explanations, or for the creation of high quality video explanations of a topic.

2 BOOK CREATOR (P,T,L,G)

One of the easiest to use iBook creation apps, allowing a teacher to create media-rich resources, or learners to make notes or create projects as part of homework, collaborative project work or revision.

3 MINDMAP EDU (P,T,L,G)

Of all the mind mapping apps available, this is the only one endorsed by Tony Buzan (the creator of the principle of Mind Mapping). Mind Mapping is a very powerful organisation, planning and thinking technique, which if used effectively has been proven to raise learners' grades.

4 I-NIGMA (F,T,L,G)

i-nigma is a QR code reader (those black and white square bar codes you see everywhere). There are many QR code readers, but this one works well as all you need to do is wave the device camera roughly in the QR code's direction, and as soon as it identifies the code it translates it into text – and if that text is a web address it takes you straight there. QR codes are a really easy way for a teacher to get learners to a particular website quickly.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVE FOORD IS REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE IPAD ACADEMY. THE IPAD ACADEMY IS THE LEADING PROVIDER OF IPAD CONSULTANCY AND TEACHER TRAINING IN THE UK. THE TRAINING DELIVERED FOCUSES ON HOW IPADS CAN BE INTRODUCED TO HAVE A SUSTAINABLE IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING. THE TEAM OF PROFESSIONALS INCLUDES APPLE DISTINGUISHED EDUCATORS, PRACTISING TEACHERS AND INDUSTRY LEADING EXPERTS. FURTHER INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT IPADACADEMY.CO.UK

5 MOBILE OCR (F,T,L,G)

This app allows you to take a photograph of printed text, and it will convert this into a text document on your device, which you can then edit and work with. This can be very useful for learners who struggle with reading, as they can use the built-in device software, which will then read this text out to them.

6 NOTABILITY (P,L,G)

This is a easy to use but powerful note taking app, which allows a learner to take notes in class combining typed text, drawn images and audio, as well as marking up existing documents, and then filing the notes in an organised manner. The app comes with a variety of different backgrounds, allowing learners to choose the one best suited to their preferences and the subject being taught.

7 GOOD READER (P,T,L,G)

Originally this app started off as a tool to annotate PDF documents, but has evolved into a very comprehensive file management option, allowing a user to save files on his or her device, to move files between storage locations, and with the ability to annotate many file types – which can be an excellent method for learners to take notes, or for teachers to give students feedback.

8 DROPBOX (F,T,L,G)

Tablet devices are designed to work by storing things in 'the cloud' rather than just on that device. There are many options for cloud storage, Dropbox being one of the best known, most widely used, and reliable. The app is free and the free account gives most people adequate storage. As well as storing files, this app can be used to easily distribute files to people, or to give other people 'read only' or editable access on folders or files.

9 SOCRATIVE (F,T,L,G)

Socrative is a simple quiz app, where the tutor downloads the teacher version of the app, and creates quizzes. The learners download the student version of the app. When a teacher wants to run a quiz, the app generates a PIN, which the students enter giving them access to the questions. The tutor can then see the students' progress as they respond.

10 THE STUDENT PLANNER APP (P,T,L,G)

This app replaces homework diaries, timetables and school calendars, as well as giving teachers a tool to get messages to learners. It has been developed by a UK company, so the terminology is appropriate. The app is free for the students, so they can download this onto their own devices – the school pays for the accounts, and there is a web environment for those without devices as well.