

Appy Hour

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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For the last seven years or so, I have been a part of a professional learning community called Appy Hour. We meet once a week after school and talk about tech tools, apps, and best practice teaching strategies.

I have been thinking about how quickly educational technology changes, and how many choices there are for apps, tech tools etc. Despite the fast pace at which these learning tools change, there seem to be some apps that I have consistently used over the years regardless of what new apps have come out. In my classroom, I have three iPads I have purchased myself, 3 school iPads, and ten iPads that were donated by friends or family that don't use their old ones and were willing to give them up. I am getting close to having a class set but am obviously not quite there yet.

In this article, I am going to outline my top 5 educational apps of all time. Some of these apps still work on the iPad 1, which is really important to me, as that is what type is usually donated. Some of the apps cost around \$1-2 but it was definitely worth the investment for me, as I am still using them after 8 years.

#1. Doodle Buddy- This drawing app is basically a white board app for kids. The neat part about this app is that it has the capacity to type words/headings rather than just write it with your finger. (Good if you are teaching primary and their printing isn't very neat yet.) I have used this app in every subject. The "stamp/sticker" section is great for estimating in math or drawing out multiplication/division groups. We've used it for Venn diagrams in health and writing lists in social. It has the ease and flexibility as a regular whiteboard, but the advantage that you can save the picture or even screenshot your work, where a whiteboard would eventually need to be erased and reused.

The downside to this app is that there is a shake feature where if you shake the iPad it will erase the picture (kind of like an Etch-a-Sketch). There have been many times where this feature was enabled, a child turned the iPad to show me something and their drawing had been erased.

#2 SeeSaw- (Needs camera/microphone access so had to be at least an iPad 2.) SeeSaw is a free online learning journal that is kind of like a simple Facebook for kids/parents. The student (or the teacher) can post work to the student's learning journal where their classmates and their parents can see it. They can tag their work by putting it into a subject folder like Math or ELA, or the teacher can create folders for small groups. The students can

record video, draw, write notes, record voice all within the app, which makes it a great tool for all ages - especially if you want to differentiate for those students who have a hard time writing what they want to say.

The downside to this app is that features like having more than two teachers or setting specific privacy for certain posts but not others only comes with the paid version.

#3 Number pieces

This is a straightforward base ten app that allows students to build numbers from one into the thousands. With its capacity to zoom out, students can pull many hundreds blocks out and build quite big numbers. You can regroup or break apart the hundreds, tens or ones which comes in handy when using it for addition and subtraction with regrouping. It has a pen/eraser tool which allows students to annotate what they are doing right in the app. It works with the iPad 1, and has been a staple in almost every math unit I have taught.

The downside to this app is that it is missing some of the fancier functions that other base ten apps have. Other apps keep track of how many base ten blocks you have pulled out, which can be a helpful visual for some students who need this extra support.

#4- iMovie (This app is only available on the iPad 2 and higher)

With its intuitive feel, I can't think of an easier video editing app that my students have used. Usually all it takes is me giving my students a half hour to play around with iMovie before they have mastered editing clips, adding audio/special effects and working within iMovie's pre-made themes. It is my understanding that all new iPads automatically come with iMovie built into them. iMovie also has a great export feature that sends videos right to your YouTube account or saves to camera roll.

The downside of this app is that it takes up quite a bit of storage on the iPad, and if the original videos are deleted from camera roll, the current edit within iMovie won't play.

#5- Futaba school edition

Futaba is a 4-player game where a student sits on each side of the iPad. The question comes up in the middle, and the students race to click the right answer that is in front of them. With the school edition, you can customize the game to any subject you want. I am currently creating a Futaba for multiplication. The multiplication question will come up in the middle of the screen, and there will be four answers that show in front of each student, the first person to choose the right answer gets a point. The first student to 5 points wins the game. The neat thing about this app is that you can create any question you would like to pop up into the middle of the screen. It can be a picture for primary students, and they have to click the word. It could be a sound recording of the teacher speaking a French word, and the students have to pick the matching French or English word. There are so many options. There are also many pre-built games (like Dolch words) that come with the purchase of Futaba, so it doesn't require any prep at all.

The downsides are that there isn't a video option for questions, and it doesn't work quite as well on an iPad mini because the screen is smaller, which in turn, reduces the size of the game board/font etc.

I hope that my reviews of these apps will encourage some of you to use these apps within your own classroom or home!