

GoodCharacter.com Monthly Newsletter

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Theme of the Month: Life Skills Apps

As of this writing, it's been barely a year and a half since Apple ignited the tablet computer market by introducing the iPad; and its educational impact, now and for the future, is remarkable.

And what's an iPad without its apps? "App". A neat, simple little word that's as brief and to-the-point as the object it refers to. Hardly benign, it is also a word that says much about the person who uses it. Why, simply saying "app" a couple of times a day is a subtle but effective way to show your peers that you are truly one of the cool people. Conversely, if you don't meet your daily quota of "app"itudes, you risk being seen by your colleagues as a totally yesterday kind of person. And who needs that? Really.

So, we thought in this month's newsletter we'd take somewhat of a departure from our usual newsletter, which has always focused on classroom lesson plans for developing various aspects of good character. This time we'd like to take a look into the uses of the new technology in the classroom, particularly with respect to character education.

Sincerely,
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"Following the sun we left the Old World."
- Christopher Columbus

OCTOBER is
National Anti-
Bullying Month



Suppose you wanted to find an app that you could use to help teach the concept of respect for others – a virtue of real concern to all of us. If you take a glance at the Apple App Store and search for "respect," here's what you'll find in abundance:

GangWars - 100 Respect Points
Hockey Fight Pro
Turf Wars LOOT
Mafia: Respect and Retaliation
Rap Rivals
Imob Online
Race or Die

Nice, huh? If this is Respect, try to imagine what Dis-Respect would be! (Hint: It's not listed.)

Many of the apps we discovered are for core subjects like math and reading. Of those in the life skills area, a number of apparently successful apps are for kids with autism - a marvelous use of the technology.

The nice thing about most apps is that they are very affordable. Many are free. Many cost just a dollar or two. But studies have revealed that because of how inexpensive apps are, people buy them on impulse, don't find them all that useful, and often don't look at them more than once.

"Where is all the knowledge we lost with information?"
- T.S. Eliot

Carter County schools in Tennessee has done us a terrific service. They have produced a [website that keeps track of iPad use in schools](#). They also recommend apps for a variety of subject areas. This is a great starting point for exploring the app world.

From PBS comes this [list of six guidelines for the use of apps with children](#). These wise recommendations are for parents, but they would be just as useful for educators. Especially important are the suggestions: "Select apps from trusted, reliable sources." and "Determine whether apps are trying to market to your child."

Responsibility Apps in the iTunes App store are more positive than the ones we found on the topic of Respect. But they tend to be about things like doing chores, which may have some importance, but doesn't really hit the nail on the head.

"New technology is common, new thinking is rare."
- Sir Peter Blake

"[Ichores](#)" is typical of the Responsibility apps. It is intended to encourage kids to do things around the house by rewarding them with real dollars.

Another Responsibility app, typical of a lot of the silliness in the App world, is "The Baby Wheel of Responsibility" Here couples spin a wheel to choose who will change the baby's diaper. Think about it: wouldn't flipping a coin give the parents more time with the baby? It really is not the best, most responsible way to make good choices in life.

Unfortunately we couldn't find any meaningful apps for developing Critical Thinking – a skill that the app buyer needs to cut through the forest of nonsensical apps out there.

Here is a post by a teacher who tried to use [a few hygiene apps](#) intended to teach Life Skills in the classroom. She expresses her frustration with her students who use the technology for play rather than learning. Her words are a helpful reminder to all teachers.

"Do you realize if it weren't for Edison we'd be watching TV by candlelight?"
- Al Boliska

A number of children's book publishers are getting into the app act by adapting books for the new technology. An example of a particularly good one is the graphic novel for middle school kids, "[Be Confident in Who You Are](#)" from Free Spirit Publishing. It deals with a number of topics including teasing and self image.

Lesson Plans

Of course, this newsletter would never be complete without at least one lesson plan. Here is one for [using apps in the classroom](#) from Google. It has excellent lesson plans on a wide variety of educational topics.

News

In Clover, South Carolina three elementary school classrooms do everything from history to math [on their iPads](#). Here is how they bought them: "The tablet computers, which cost about \$500 each, were purchased with federal Title 1 money, available to schools with large low-income populations."

*"A vision without a task is a dream - a task without a vision is drudgery-
but a task with vision can change the world"*
- Black Elk

So, where does all this app stuff take us? Well, with regard to character education, it leaves us somewhere east of Eden, which is to say, the wilderness. The good news is this appears to be practically virgin territory for app developers looking for an uncrowded niche. The bad news is that it's a lot harder to app-ly meaningful character education than mad birds knocking down buildings.

Still, there must be some really good stuff out there that we just haven't found yet. And perhaps some of you folks know where to find it. So if any of you know of or come across an app that you can recommend for character education, please let us know about it. We'll start a collection and publish them in future newsletters. You can send us your recommendations by [clicking here](#).

See you next month.

Please send us your comments, suggestions, character education stories, and any other ideas that you think would be of value in helping us improve our newsletter. [E-mail](#) us today!

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