

# Evaluating the pros and cons of tablet use in early childhood classrooms

Mr. Sanchez, who works in a dual-language pre-K classroom, is crafting a learning activity on a familiar animals-at-home theme—and he’s eager to make the traditional theme come alive in his classroom. He reviews his objectives and goals, identifies what children in the group already know, and considers what they might like to know. After doing an inventory of supplies, he develops a few new activities that he can use with materials he already has on hand.

As Mr. Sanchez plans, he considers how he might use electronic media—specifically, the classroom’s new tablets—to add another layer of enrichment while being mindful of not using more technology than necessary. After reviewing his plan, he chooses a couple of tablet apps that will both stimulate and reinforce the children’s learning that can complement the hands-on activities he wants to use.

Mr. Sanchez knows that “Tablets can personalize learning for diverse learners, including dual-lan-

guage learners. The devices can help them learn new skills and become familiar with routines and activities” (Blagojevic, Brumer, Chevalier, O’Clair, & Thomes, 2014).



Electronic media is more common than ever before, including in early care and education classrooms, but not without controversy. We read articles about how it can be really negative, yet we watch television commercials that advertise tablet apps for educational games, that say they “prove to increase learning, reading, math knowledge” (Elgersma, 2018).

Teachers often feel an internal struggle of whether or not to allow children to use technology, including how, how much, and when. The fact is that we are seeing increasing technology integration in early childhood classrooms—even with the youngest children—and must determine how and when it is appropriate. Technology must be used in both an age and developmentally appropriate manner.

Below is a brief analysis of the pros, cons, and considerations of the use of technology with young children, along with some ideas for classroom use.

## The pros of tablet use

Some of the literature indicates that engagement in interactive games may stimulate the brain, help children to learn tasks better, and empower children to communicate, as it boosts language development.

One app source (Readingeggs.com), for example, states that use of one of its reading apps showed improved literacy among second-grade children during the 2016-17 school year.

More studies are underway and are indeed necessary, especially because tablets are new to many of



CREATIVE COMMONS: AMANDA GOLDEN

---

us. In addition, long-term studies are essential so that we can know more about any negative effects over time.

## The cons of tablet use

One of the biggest concerns about tablet use is that the tablet is causing children to withdraw, as the technology acts like a babysitter in some cases. Some studies (Dunkley, Dec. 2, 2013) suggest that using media devices (phone or tablet) can cause behavioral issues, lead to obesity, and have a negative impact on socialization in young children.

One could argue away some of these conclusions, but the truth is that we are still learning more about the impact of technology use with children and more research is needed. With that being said, we can consider some of the downfalls of using technology with children and weigh that against our reason for use in the classroom.

## Guidelines and considerations

The American Academy of Pediatrics (May 1, 2018) suggests that children younger than 2 should not be independently engaged in the use of any media: face-to-face interactions with people are essential to a baby's development across all domains. Given these facts, here are some considerations for use of technology in the classroom.

- Ensure that your program allows for and supports technology integration in the classroom. Be sure to follow all program guidelines for what is approved.
- Think about the age and development of the children in your classroom. Are you using technology that supports learning in a developmentally appropriate way?
- Carefully choose and monitor the apps you allow in the classroom. Are they research-based? Are they age and developmentally appropriate? Are they lessening the time that children engage in physical activity? Are there any safety risks?

Review the apps before using in the classroom. Ensure that there is no function or space that would allow the children to connect with or get messages from anyone outside the classroom.

Review app-review sites to see what other users have been saying, along with getting suggestions from colleagues and the program director.

- Use the technology to engage in the fun with the

children. Use the apps or other online resources with the children so they enjoy learning, such as by showing pictures related to your theme—animals, in the case of Mr. Sanchez. Play a music video or song that the children can watch and dance with you during movement time.

---

## USE THE TECHNOLOGY TO ENGAGE IN THE FUN WITH THE CHILDREN.

---

Remember that the technology is used with you as the teacher, not as a substitute. Given the dangers that come with technology, such as potentially inappropriate sites or misinformation, it is essential to monitor everything that is happening on the device at all times.

- Monitor the amount of time spent on the device. Be aware of how often you are integrating the technology and ensure it is used as a support to the learning, not a replacement to what you can engage children in otherwise.

## Use technology as a support

We still have much research ahead of us, but we are learning more about technology use with children every day. Be aware of both the pros and cons, and consider all factors before integrating technology into the classroom. Remember that it is vital that we use technology as a support, not as a replacement for learning in the classroom. Be creative and use it wisely!

## References

- American Academy of Pediatrics. (May 1, 2018). Children and media: Tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics. Retrieved from [/www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/news-features-and-safety-tips/Pages/Children-and-Media-Tips.aspx](http://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/news-features-and-safety-tips/Pages/Children-and-Media-Tips.aspx).
- Blagojevic, B., Brumer, H., Chevalier, S., O'Clair, A., & Thomes, K. (October/November 2012). *Touch and Grow: Learning and Exploring Using Tablets*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved June 5,

- 
- 2018, from [www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/oct2012/learning-exploring-tablets](http://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/oct2012/learning-exploring-tablets).
- British Broadcasting Company. (2016). Are Tablets Good for Children? Retrieved May 1, 2018, from [www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3tsyrd](http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z3tsyrd).
- Dunkley, V. (Dec. 23, 2013). An overlooked factor in the childhood Obesity epidemic, *Psychology Today*. Retrieved from [www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-wealth/201312/overlooked-factor-in-the-childhood-obesity-epidemic](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/mental-wealth/201312/overlooked-factor-in-the-childhood-obesity-epidemic).
- Elgersma, C. (June 11 2018). 5 Apps to Boost Math Skills over the Summer. Common sense media. Retrieved July 16, 2018 from [www.commonsense-media.org/blog/5-apps-to-boost-math-skills-over-the-summer](http://www.commonsense-media.org/blog/5-apps-to-boost-math-skills-over-the-summer).
- Ferrari, Nancy. (Oct. 29, 2015.) iPad apps and screen time for kids: Learning or babysitting. Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School. Retrieved Sept. 21, 2016, from [www.health.harvard.edu/blog/ipad-apps-and-screen-time-for-kids-learning-or-babysitting-201205114673](http://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/ipad-apps-and-screen-time-for-kids-learning-or-babysitting-201205114673).
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (January 2012). Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth Through Age 8 (2012). Retrieved from [www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PS\\_technology\\_WEB2.pdf](http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PS_technology_WEB2.pdf).
- Readingeggs.com. (n.d.). Research spotlight: Literacy Success Using Reading Eggs. (2016-17). Retrieved from <https://readingeggs.com/about/research/>.

## About the author

Jessica Alvarado, EdD, is an assistant professor of early childhood education in the Teacher Education Department in the Sanford College of Education, National University. She has spent more than a decade working with children and families in different capacities and has grown to love working with adult learners. ■