

There's an app for (almost) everything

New technology tools for EC professionals — Part 2

by Chip Donohue

Welcome back! I've been busy playing with lots of new tech tools so that I can suggest a few for you to try out. In Part 1 (What's in Your Toolbox?, *Exchange*, May/June 2010) I shared my concerns about the utilization and participation gaps that get in the way of early childhood professionals using new tech tools effectively and efficiently in their personal and professional lives. I described the barriers of access, affordability, equity, tech skills, and adult literacy. And I shared my concerns about the difference between personal and professional use and how important it is for early childhood professionals to gain technology skills and confidence in their ability to use technology tools and applications (apps).

In Part 2, I want to share some of the tech tools and free apps that I use every day and that you can easily access and use to move from ECE 1.0 to a faster, more up-to-date — and much more fun — 2.0 version of your technology-using



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access, create pathways, enhance learning, and improve teaching practices in early childhood education. He spends lots of time playing with new technology tools to enable relationships and build learning communities online.

self. Here are a few definitions of keywords and concepts to get you started:

Web 2.0: Describes the second generation of Internet technology and applications that is focused on dynamic Web pages for open communication, Web-based communities, collaboration, and information sharing online. Blogs, wikis, social media, RSS, and Web services are examples of Web 2.0 applications.

Apps: Short for 'applications,' an app is a piece of software that can run on the Internet, on your computer, on your smartphone or other mobile devices.

Social Media: Internet and mobile-based tools for sharing information, exchanging ideas, and creating shared meaning. Web 2.0 made social media sites and apps possible and forever changed the way we connect, communicate, collaborate, and create communities online. Social media is based on a philosophy that values a participatory culture and includes user participation, user-contributed content and user ratings, rankings, and reviews. Facebook,[®] My Space,[®] Twitter,[®] and Linked In[®] are a few familiar examples.

Three technology trends that are impacting how we use technology and where

we use it are convergence, mobile technology, and social media.

Convergence: When a phone is more than a phone

Do you remember the first time you saw a Swiss Army[®] Knife with all of those tools and gadgets hidden inside that sleek red shape? Well, smartphones are the Swiss Army[®] Knife of the digital generation. Smartphones — like the iPhone,[®] Google Android,[®] Palm Pre,[®] Blackberry,[®] and others — are powerful examples of the convergence of hardware, software, and apps into one powerful, hand-held digital device. Most smartphones offer a similar array of features and apps, including:

- Phone
- eMail
- Internet browser
- Text messages
- Calendars & Contacts
- Tools: Clock, Notes, Calculator, Maps, Weather
- Photos
- Camera
- Music/video player

While all smartphone manufacturers are developing apps these days, Apple[®] provides an example of apps designed

for a variety of digital devices including the iPhone,[®] iPod Touch,[®] and now the iPad.[®] The Apps Store on iTunes[®] is well on the way to 150,000 free and paid apps available in the following categories:

- Books
- Business
- Education
- Entertainment
- Finance
- Games
- Healthcare & Fitness
- Lifestyle
- Medical
- Music
- Navigation
- News
- Photography
- Productivity
- Reference
- Social Networking
- Sports
- Travel
- Utilities
- Weather

There really is an app for that

The smartphone embodies all three trends: Convergence, mobile devices, and social media in one small hand-held package. When a cell phone is 'smart,' it becomes a powerful tool for living, learning, and working, not just for communicating. And it's fun to use!

Going mobile

I can pull up to the curb,

I can make it on the road,

Goin' mobile

I can stop in any street

And talk with people that we meet

Goin' mobile

Keep me moving.

"Going Mobile," Pete Townshend and

The Who

In 1971 the Who were 'going mobile,' but who could have predicted how mobile we would all be going in 2010? A significant trend in tech tools and

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apps is the explosion of mobile devices including smartphones, netbooks, tablet computers, hand-held gaming devices, and more. In the next 12 months we'll see a flood of mobile devices that put incredible computing, communicating, and collaborating tools in your hand and make anytime, anywhere connections a reality. Desktop computers are quickly being replaced by laptops, and laptops are facing strong competition from smartphones, netbooks, and tablets as the features and functionality of mobile technology increase and the size and portablility of devices decreases.

Social media

Social media tools help us connect, communicate, collaborate, and build learning communities online. The emphasis on user participation, user-generated content, and creating shared meaning are a perfect fit for who we are as early childhood professionals. These functions are familiar ways of working together,

but in this case we need technology tools to make it possible.

While some in ECE worry about online interactions replacing face-to-face interactions and relationships (the heart of our work with young children and families), these tools have the ability to expand our networks, expose us to new ideas, introduce new people, and learn with and from each other in ways that were never possible before. And all you need is a smartphone with a social networking app to participate. Remember my two big concerns in the first article were that we weren't utilizing the technologies we have at hand, and that many were opting out of participating in online communication and collaboration. With tech tools in hand, the right apps, and a willingness to be part of the online conversation, social media is a perfect fit for ECE 2.0.

If you're ready to put your toe in the water, here are 10 well-known, easy-to-

use, and fun social media apps that you can play with and learn to use personally while you consider how to use them professionally.

- Facebook: www.facebook.com
- Linked In: www.linkedin.com
- MySpace: www.myspace.com
- Twitter: www.twitter.com
- Delicious: www.delicious.com
- Diigo: www.diigo.com
- Skype: www.skype.com
- Wikispaces: www.wikispaces.com
- YouTube: www.youtube.com

And two more that I'm playing with these days:

- Google Buzz — <https://buzz.google.com>
- Google Wave — <https://wave.google.com>

In an upcoming article, Fran Simon and I will go into greater detail about what social media is and how you can use it to connect with others and strengthen your program. If you can't wait until then, here are two places to get started:

- See, *Social Media Resources for Newbies* — *There's nothing to fear! (I promise!)* at Fran Simon's Blog, 140+: In the Moment... www.esbyfs.com/socialmediareources
- Visit Common Craft Videos at www.commoncraft.com and Lee Lefever's CommonCraft channel on YouTube at www.youtube.com/user/leelefever#g/u to view a variety of their ...*In Plain English* videos on topics like Social Networking in Plain English and Plain English Twitter.

Making a list and checking it twice

When I go looking for new tech tools and apps for myself or to integrate into the online learning program at Erikson

Institute, I have a simple list of essentials that I follow to ensure that what I select adds new features and functionality to my tech toolbox:

Tech Tool Essentials

- Free
- Easy to use
- Fun to play with
- Useful

So with the essential list in your head and your laptop, netbook, tablet, or smartphone in hand, it's time to start adding tools to your toolbox. Think about what is in your technology toolbox and what's missing and think about what you need to add to move toward ECE 2.0 personally and professionally. Finally, pick tools you will actually use and that will enable, encourage, and empower you to participate. Let the hunting and gathering begin!

The Top 20 Web 2.0 Tools in My Tool Kit (and what I use them for)

I always get asked what tech tools and applications I use everyday in my personal and professional lives. Here are my top 5 must-have apps, plus 15 more free tools that are in my tech toolbox today; the list keeps changing as I learn about and play with new apps and tools.

1. Facebook for connecting with people, organizations, and causes: www.facebook.com
2. Firefox for an open-source web browser on my Macs and PCs: www.mozilla.com/firefox/
3. Google Apps for tools including Gmail, Reader, Calendar, Groups, Docs, Blogger, Maps, Earth, and more: www.google.com/apps/
4. Skype for free audio and video calls over the Internet with screen sharing: www.skype.com
5. Twitter for real-time communication, connection, monitoring and learning: www.twitter.com

6. Audacity for recording and editing audio clips for online classes: <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>
7. Bing for visual search and a change of pace from other search engines: www.bing.com
8. Diigo for sharing and saving useful websites with annotations: www.diigo.com
9. Dropbox for backing up, syncing, and sharing files between my computers: www.dropbox.com/
10. iTunes U for free content and courses from colleges and universities: www.apple.com/itunes
11. Jing for capturing screen shots and recording video of screen action with audio: www.jingproject.com/
12. Open Office for a suite of open source office software including word processing, spreadsheet, pre-

Learn More — Top Tools for Learning

Want to learn more or find a few more tools to play with? The Centre for Learning & Performance Technologies keeps a list of the 100 Top Tools for Learning organized in these categories:

Instructional tools

- Live tools
- Document and presentation tools
- Blogging, web, and wiki tools
- Image, audio, and video tools
- Communication tools
- Micro-blogging tools
- Collaboration tools
- Social networking and collaboration spaces
- Personal productivity tools
- Browsers, players, and readers
- Mobile tools

Check out the Top Tools for Learning list at <http://c4lpt.co.uk/recommended/index.html>

sensation and database applications:
www.openoffice.org

13. Photobucket for uploading, sharing, linking, and finding photos, videos, and graphics:
<http://photobucket.com/>
14. Prezi for creating presentations without slides: <http://prezi.com/>
15. Readability for making it easier to read web pages by removing the clutter: <http://lab.arc90.com/experiments/readability/>
16. Tagxedo for creating a word cloud that highlights the frequency of occurrence within the body of text:
www.tagxedo.com
17. Tweetdeck for aggregating and organizing Tweets, Facebook, and Linked In updates: www.tweetdeck.com
18. Vimeo for finding and viewing videos contributed by users:
www.youtube.com/
19. Wikispaces for creating wiki pages and collaborating with others:
www.wikispaces.com
20. Xmarks for syncing bookmarks between computers, operating systems and browsers: www.xmarks.com/

As much fun as I have playing with new tech tools and toys, I can't possibly keep up with all the latest technologies and apps. So I look forward to reading the Top Tools list each time it is updated to see how many of the 100 tools I'm already using or have tried out, and what

Learn More ... Popular Tech Tools and Apps

A few other important sources for what's new and what's hot are:

- Technology Tools for Educators:
www.techandyoungchildren.org/educators.html
- Cool tools for schools:
<http://cooltoolsforschools.wikispaces.com/Collaborative+Tools>
- Go2Web20: www.go2web20.net/
- 21 Things for the 21st Century Teacher: www.21things4teachers.net/index.html

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tools are new to me and worth having a play with.

Best in Show: ECE 2.0

I am also asked about which early childhood organizations or projects are using Web 2.0 and social media tools in innovative ways. Here are my 10 nominees (in alphabetical order) for Best in Show

in the ECE category. Each of these use technology in ways that provide professionals with access to new resources, connections, and invitations to participate in the online community, and have 'nudged' the field forward by raising the technology utilization bar.

- Aim4Excellence, McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership: <http://aim4excellence.nl.edu>
- BAM Radio:
www.bamradionetwork.com/
- Child Care Aware Parent Network:
www.ccaparentnetwork.org/
- Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media:
www.fredrogerscenter.org/
- NACCRRRA: www.naccrra.org
- NAEYC: www.naeyc.org
- NAEYC Technology and Young Children Interest Forum:
www.techandyoungchildren.org/
- eCDA, Teaching Strategies/Bright Horizons Family Solutions:
www.teachingstrategies.com/

- The Science of Child Development: www.scienceofecd.com
- Videatives: www.videatives.com

Take some time to visit these websites and look around. These organizations have worked hard to develop a Web presence that connects people to information, ideas, and each other. Notice the ways in which a Web 2.0 approach is demonstrated. Find new resources, subscribe to their RSS feeds, get on their e-newsletter lists, bookmark the site, share it with others, and join the conversation, if there are opportunities to interact with other professionals who share your passion for early care and education. We're all learning how to use these new tools and apps. I find it especially helpful to reflect on what works and what's new within the context of early care and education online.

A final reflection and a nudge

Let me end where this two-part series began. I encourage you to reflect on how the gap between personal and professional use of technology impacts your work and daily life. Become a part of the amazing conversations and community-building happening online right now. Remember:

- What you need is already right at your fingertips.
- Once you're online, it really is a small world after all.
- The most effective tools for ECE blend the digital and the relational.
- ECE professionals need tools for communication, collaboration, community-building . . . for ECE 2.0.
- You need to find and use technology tools for living, learning, and working.
- And . . . say it with me . . . it's not about the technology!

NAEYC Position Statement on Technology and Young Children

NAEYC has partnered with the Fred Rogers Center for early learning and children's media to revise the Position Statement on Technology and Young Children that was last updated in 1996. View the current statement at www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/positions/PSTECH98.PDF. Share your ideas or concerns about how technology can and should be used with young children in early childhood settings and at home. Contribute to the revision process by posting your comments at www.naeyc.org/position/statements/tech.

Use technology tools and apps to better serve the young children, families, and community you serve. Use these tools and apps to connect with each other to confront challenging issues and pressing problems by exchanging ideas with other ECE professionals and finding the solutions together.

I'll see you online.

Stay tuned for more *Exchange* articles and resources on technology tools for living, learning, and working. Mark Mahoney is writing on "Harnessing the power of social media to build your business" in November. And I will be back in January with Fran Simon on "What's your social media personality? How it helps or hinders networking implementation and success."

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