

# Circulating iPads in the Children's Library

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<http://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2011/11/circulating-ipads-in-the-childrens-library/>

This September, my library began circulating iPads for use with young children. What



began as a “Hey-this-would-be-neat-let’s-try-it-and-see-what-happens” project has evolved into an immensely popular service that has both our patrons and fellow librarians buzzing. What follows will describe how and why we developed this new service with tips on helping other librarians jump into developing their own model. I have tried to address questions and concerns based upon inquires we have received from librarians across the country looking into circulating their own touchscreen devices. Please feel free to ask additional questions in the comments section.

## Why Circulate iPads to Children?

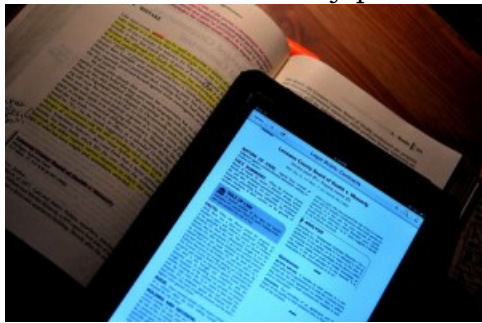
*Isn't too much screentime bad for young children? Don't kids these days already spend too much time in front of gadgets and computers? What ever happened to parents reading a story face to face with their child?* These are just a few of the types of questions and concerns that some librarians have asked about our iPad project at Darien Library. And these are valid concerns. In a world in which children are increasingly “containerized” and social interaction has become increasingly mediated by LCDs instead of faces, why would we promote the use of another screen between parent and child?



There is a two-fold answer:

(1) Technology is not the enemy. It is tempting to operate as if supporting literacy is a zero-sum game in which the players are technology versus books. But it is not a simple dichotomy. Touch-screen technology, in particular, offers a chance for children to interact and learn in a rich, sensory-based environment. For children who respond better to visual, auditory and kinesthetic modalities, touch-screen learning can open up a whole new world of educational experiences. In conjunction with traditional book-sharing between child and parent, devices like the iPad can boost early literacy skill-building as well as stimulate visual and media literacy development. The fine motor skills that are engaged, combined with the multi-sensory, interactive nature of many apps makes the iPad an ideal device for small hands and young minds.

2) We live in a multi-format world where children (i.e., digital natives) expect to receive information and content in a variety of ways: print, online or via the latest device. As information and literacy professionals, we have a responsibility to help our patrons



navigate this new world. If we are worried about children using technology in negative and possibly damaging ways, what better reason for introducing it early and teaching children (and their parents) how to interact with technology in positive and developmentally-appropriate ways?

[On a sidenote: I recently attended the Annual Educator's Night at The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art. Anita Silvey, Betsy Bird, and Lisa Holton were on a panel discussing the future of children's books (the subtext being "*in an increasingly digital world.*") Besides leaving the event with a healthy dose of optimism regarding the vibrant future of children's literature and art, I recall an interesting tidbit from their conversation: as Amazon's ebook downloads have increased, so have the sales of the corresponding print books. Perhaps something to ponder for anyone concerned about the "death of print media."]

## How to Circulate iPads in the Library

This one is a little trickier. It is largely dependent upon the type of library and community in which you work. It also depends on your budget and/or fundraising and grant possibilities. Finally, to circulate iPads (or any other touchscreen device) in your library, you must have the support of the administration. Without the higher-ups in your organization backing up your initiative, chances are you will have a heck of a time securing the funding, tech support, and cooperation of circulation staff necessary to make it a reality.

### *Get the Players on Board*

The first step to getting administration and your coworkers to support an iPad project is to explain the WHY. (See above section.) During the initial planning stages of our own iPad project at Darien, Gretchen Caserotti, then Head of Children's Services and current chair of the ALSC Children's and Technology Committee, used her passion for and understanding of the role of technology in the lives of young children to communicate the importance of the project to our library leaders. Go in armed with information and a solid plan. Research the initial cost it will take to launch the service. If iPads are out of your budget, look into cheaper tablets that may work just as well. Start small and track usage.

### *Marketing and Packaging*

It was important for us not to simply throw a cool, new device into the hands of children and parents without context. Of course, had we done that, our iPads



would likely still have circulated like hot cakes, but the objective was not to simply have patrons borrow a device. Instead, the goal was to use the device as a tool for children and their grownups to discover wonderfully designed, educational and developmentally-appropriate apps and ebooks. As a result, we decided to create *Early Literacy iPad Kits*. The kits are geared towards a very specific demographic and are packaged with that user base in mind.

Our Early Literacy iPad Kits include:

- An iPad 2 pre-loaded with librarian-selected apps geared towards pre-readers (generally, ages 2 to 5.)
- An annotated list of the librarian-selected apps.
- Tips and information on what makes a great app for children and how parents can find more.
- A fact sheet on screentime and how touchscreen technology can be used with young children.
- A list of further resources (including books, articles, and websites) on technology and children.
- Detailed instructions on using our Overdrive collection to download ebooks and digital audiobooks.
- A survey (available on paper or online.) Our goal for the survey was to gauge how families were using the kits, why they were using them, and what improvements they might like to see in the next upgrade of the kits.

In addition to the pre-loaded apps and the handouts, the iPad itself is in a sturdy case and covered with a protective film.

### *Nitty, Gritty Circulation Details*

Librarians are nothing if not organized and logistics-minded! As such, many people want to know: *How do patrons check them out? How long can they keep them? What about damage or loss? Do they sign a liability form? What about the settings? Do you restrict access to any of the features? What about privacy concerns? How do you wipe personal info before checking it out to the next patron?*

While some of the answers will depend a lot on your own library structure and circulation policies, here is what we have done:

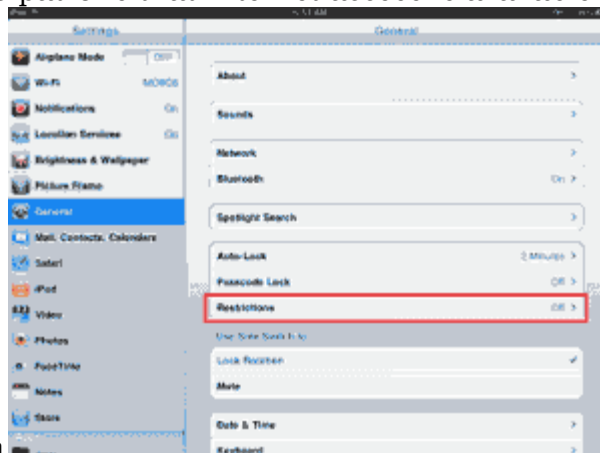
*Physical packaging:* Darien Library has six Early Literacy iPad Kits. As stated above, they circulate in a heavy-duty canvas case and the iPad itself is encased in plastic and gel. That cuts down on normal wear and tear. A tag attached to the handle of the canvas bag includes the item barcode, which is linked to the item record. Darien Library uses RFID tags on all of our items, so our iPad kits are also equipped with an RFID tag on the back of the iPad itself. Patrons come into the Children's Library to pick up a Kit. They are stored in a locked area of the Children's Library office.

*Borrowing and Returning:* The Kits circulate for one week and are able to be placed on hold. When a patron checks out a kit, they must sign a Liability Form. The form explains that they are responsible for all the parts and itemizes the individual costs for lost or damaged items. As per our circulation policies, we do not require that patrons provide a credit card. In the event of a lost or damaged kit, we would charge their library account in the same manner we would handle a lost or damaged book. Patrons are given a mini “tour” of the kit by a staff member before checking out. We explain how to use the iPad, how to access the apps and how to adjust the settings.

We ask that patrons return the Kits directly to the Children’s Library (rather than through our self-return system or to our Welcome Desk.) Upon return, a staff member will check the physical condition of the device and hardware (the iPad itself, the case, and the charger.) We encourage the patrons to keep the informational handouts. After checking the item in, we wipe the content by restoring the iPad back to original factory settings. This is to ensure that any and all personal information that may have been left on the device is deleted. We then reload the iPad with the librarian-selected apps. At this time, we also recharge the iPad for the next user. Depending on the battery level, this process can take anywhere from ten minutes to an hour. This is important when there is an active hold on the Kit. In those cases, we can temporarily suspend the hold until the Kit is reloaded and ready for the next patron.

### *Settings and Restrictions*

As long as you completely wipe and reload the Kits after every use and clearly explain to patrons that Internet access is available (and possibly unfiltered) on



an iPad, you can conceivably keep the restrictions to a minimum. We do not check out our Kits to children, but require an adult to be the responsible party in moderating use of the various features. If however, you are not prepared or willing to wipe the iPad in between uses, it is essential to understand the settings and limit them appropriately.

It is possible to “turn off” access to the Internet and the email application. Under the Restrictions tab, you can also restrict access to iTunes and the App Store. This can be particularly helpful if you are concerned with patrons accidentally buying apps or music. You may also wish to turn off the Locations feature, which tracks the physical location of the iPad via GPS.

There is no one-size-fits-all policy regarding the settings and restrictions for iPads you circulate. What is important is to play around with the settings and features, understand what they are, how they work and how you (and parents) can limit them if necessary.

### *Updating and Keeping It Fresh*

As with any new service or collection, it’s important to update and make changes periodically. New apps are being developed and released daily. There have probably been several dozen new apps for children that came out during the time it took me to write this blog post. A new part of my job, along with staying abreast of wonderful new print and audio books for children, is to stay aware of great new apps and ebooks. I use professional journals, blogs, websites, and recommendations via Twitter to help me weed through the overwhelming number of new apps on the market. My coworkers and I share this information with each other and will use that to update and upgrade our Early Literacy iPad Kits over the course of the next few months. We will also take into account the information from the survey of Kit users.

### **iPads in the Library So Far**

Is it any surprise that the iPad kits have been a major hit? Since their launch on September 15, they have seen a holds queue of at least 40 patrons long at any given time. We have not yet had to worry about storing the kits, since they are always checked out. One thing that we have learned: the “wipedown” that occurs upon return must be both digital and physical. In this case, a good hand sanitizer is essential. Or, if you have access to a sanitizing UV wand, that works nicely, too.

Thinking about circulating iPads in your library? Feel free to ask questions in the comments below or contact me directly at [kparrott@darienlibrary.org](mailto:kparrott@darienlibrary.org).

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