**Application name:** My Talking Angela

**Link:** <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/my-talking-angela/id909351158?mt=8>

**Ages:** 13+ (but actually most likely played by younger girls)

**Description of Application:** The app is very similar to the tamagotchi gadget of the 1990s. You have a cat (called Angela) that you need to feed, pet, bathe, etc. The difference is that this app is more interactive and has a bunch of game mechanic elements. These include the ability to earn coins if you “take care” of the cat and the ability to earn stickers as you “level up”.

The first part of my analysis will focus on the four pillars of learning and see how the application stacks up.

Active

This application is definitely more “mind off” than “mind on”. Although it does have some active elements where the player needs to read the instructions, but the required action is always clearly blinking on the screen in front of you, and you really don’t need to think in order to play. Even the “side games” are extremely simple and “mind off”, for example a game of a cat trying to drag a ball in a straight line!

Engagement

On the engagement scale, the app scores well on some levels of engagement, particularly behavioral engagement, because it has a clear path of rules and steps to follow in order to progress through the game for the most part. The cat is cute and could give the application medium score on emotional engagement. However, the app definitely doesn’t engage the player on a cognitive level. There is little that a child needs to think about and at some point in the game I could see children being distracted and trying to press anything on the screen in order to get a reaction, especially when the game reaches a point where you have to wait for a notification to do something with the cat.

Meaningful

If you take out the game mechanics of the application (that I find to be a bit too consumer-focused and commercialized, especially the coins and diamonds), there is a meaningful element to the game in that you learn to take care of the cat. In addition, the things you do to the cat are meaningful to a child, like bathing, brushing their teeth, cleaning their room, etc. which I believe is a positive part of the app.

Socially Interactive

One important element of the app is the fact that the cat is very cute and lovable, and I could very much see a para-social relationship developing between the child and the cat. The fact that the cat is reliant on the playing child for “survival” may even increase this para-social connection. However, the app is very much a single player experience, and actually the risk of being attached to the character may lead to negative social habits with friends and family.

Things I would Change

I understand that the application needs to make money, however I really didn’t like how the ads were presented to the players. It was VERY easy to click on ads and be sidetracked. This lowers not only the engagement, but also increases the risk of children drifting off into unknown territory with the ads. I would definitely design a better way of exposing children to ads.

I also didn’t like the consumerism with the coins and diamonds and the functionality of watching videos to get coins. All of that gives a very commercial taste to the experience. Again, I acknowledge the need to make money from the app, and I even think the addition of coins could be made into a positive one. Why not have Angela “earn her allowance” with the coins? This has the potential to introduce a new and important lesson for children and is less obtrusive than a casino-like clinging of coins for doing tasks.

Another point is that I couldn’t see ANY educational challenge in the app. Perhaps helping Angela with her homework would be a good step in making the game more “mind on” and active for the child. They have some simple “side games”, but these are not educational by any stretch of the imagination and are not woven well into the core game experience of Angela and taking care of her.

Also I REALLY didn’t like that you are able to hit Angela. They even have a slap noise when you hit her. This is completely wrong in my opinion! A final thing I may add is the feature of engaging others in the experience, perhaps even parents.