

# You Say Software, I Say App

## Welcome to the Twisted Language of Educational Technology

by Warren Buckleitner

Last year, North America's biggest educational technology show changed its name. NECC (National Educational Computing Conference) became the ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education).

It's not alone. The IDSA (Interactive Digital Software Association) became the ESA (Entertainment Software Association). The SPA (Software Publisher's Association) is now the SIIA (Software & Information Industry Association). Why all the title broadening? Nobody knows what to call it. Our own publication has changed names three times, from *Children's Software Review* (1993), to *Children's Software & New Media Review* (1998), to its current name, *Children's Technology Review*.

The need for some common language reference points is increasing. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), of which I'm a member, is trying to finish a position statement that will contain a good deal of official language about children and technology. One of the authors of the statement, Chip Donahue of the Erickson Institute posted a request to narrow the blurry language on a the ECETech listserv. That's what inspired this article.

I like Interactive Media (IM) as a least worse choice, because it best sums up the products we review. The word interactive refers to the relationship between the child and the content, or the media which, when taken literally, could mean just about anything. This interaction (inter) in part implies activity, which lies at the heart of play, active learning (aka constructivism), and it provides a big enough umbrella to cover apps, play, smart toys, video games, virtual worlds, ebooks and web sites. It also has enough of a constructivist flavor to send a soft message without scaring away the behaviors.

Another solution is to flip the challenge upside down and ask What shouldn't we call it? Here are some ideas, followed by a list of terms that seem hot or cold. :

**21st Century.** Policy makers and politicians use phrases like "affordances of digital media" or game-based learning with 21st century STEM learning. This is code for hey brother, can you spare a grant?

**Constructionism.** There are some other blurry words that can stain you with a cultural badge you might not want. Say constructionism instead of constructivism and you can make Piagetians squirm, and everyone knows you're drinking the Papert kool-aid.

**Digital.** Another way to blur the conversation is to use digital as in digital media or digital learning. I've noticed it is popular with smarter people with funding, who might also drop words like transmedia, which is multimedia with an Internet twist. Connected is another word losing favor, becoming as unsexy as the eRate. These ivory tower words are really too squishy to move a conversation along toward a conclusion. Like screen you can use digital to distort a sentence into just about any direction. Plus -- as of 2009, all television media became digital by law, so just about everything that isn't analog is digital, from cameras to flashlights. See <http://www.dtv.gov/whatisdtv.html>.

**Edutainment.** See chocolate covered broccoli. Just don't use it. It will pull you back ten years, when Pre-DVD multiplatform CD-ROMs ruled were king.

**Games.** If you're a stodgy old educator — say over 25, who wants to be hip, you might say games, video games, serious games, or video game based learning. You might call yourself a gamer yourself who perhaps attends E3 and watches G4 where it's also called electronic entertainment as in the Electronic Entertainment Expo. You want kids to program games and gamify learning experiences, which implies making a set of math problems more fun; a trick good teachers have long mastered long before the microprocessor with games like Around the World. You might also say chocolate covered broccoli (see Jenkins et al). If you go the game world, you might also consider wearing a tight black T-shirt. But use the G word with caution around 5th graders, gamblers and librarians. At

### A Guide to the Words: Hot, Warm and Cold

Based on my reading of press releases and conference presentations, here's an attempt to sort some of the words. Keep in mind, this is just one person's attempt to interpret this language.

#### Hot Words

3D  
4G  
Android  
App Store  
Apps  
AR (augmented reality)  
Browser Based Game  
Casual Game  
Cloud  
Download  
Ebook  
eMail  
Friends (as in friends circle)  
Google  
Handheld  
HD (for high definition, which TV)  
HDMI (replacing VGA)  
Information  
Motion-based controls (motion based interface)  
Multi-touch  
Personal (as in personal computer, or personal technology)  
Streaming  
Tablets (instead of just iPads, because it can include Android devices)  
Texting (replacing typing)  
Twitter and Tweets  
Virtual World



## Words Neither Hot or Cold

Code  
Computer  
Consumer Electronics  
Digital  
Hardware  
Programming language  
Social Media  
Software  
Typing  
USB  
Video Game  
Wiki  
Wireless

## Cold Words

Arcades (arcade games)  
Blogs (replaced by Facebook and Google +)  
Computer cafes  
Computer labs  
Computer literacy  
Computer literate  
Console (as in Game Console)  
CD ROM  
Cyber cafes  
Cyber savvy  
Disk, Floppy Disk or Diskette  
DVD  
Educational software  
Edutainment  
Fax  
Facsimile  
Hard disk  
Keyboarding  
Laptop  
Micro  
Microcomputers  
MMORPG (or Massive Multi-Player)  
PC (Personal Computer)  
RSS  
Serious Games  
Smart phones (increasingly all phones will be smart)  
Television  
Transmedia  
TV (remember that?)  
VGA or SVGA  
Video Game

<http://1.usa.gov/oH7TVa> a game is a slot machine, and many librarians think a game means Scrabble to be used for a gaming night. I say it's time for game to go the way of the fax machine.

**Multimedia.** If you want to date yourself, say PC, multimedia or macromedia instead of Flash or browser-based. See also Edutainment.

**Play.** At conferences like INPlay and the Sandbox Summit, the word play comes up a lot, as something to be cherished and protected. But this is really code for constructivism and active learning which are hardly new ideas, at least in educational psychology circles. Play is like technology. It is a general idea that, when used alone, can create a conceptual spinout. It needs to be combined with another word to provide framing.

**Screens.** I think there's a reason the word screen, as in screen-based learning is just two letters off from scream. I've heard it come up in conversations with those who think children should grow up in an electronics-free world, aka luddites. The word makes no distinction between interactive and non-interactive experiences, lumping all new stuff into one bucket. So the billboard displaying a new car video on the entrance ramp going into the Lincoln Tunnel could be the same thing as an episode of Mr. Rogers. Screen is a word for circular discussions and should be used with a guiding word, if at all.

**STEM** stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics which is the governments way of saying we need more geeks who wear pocket protectors. See 21st Century. See also No Child Left Behind. See also eRate. STEM is code for we'll help you get federal money or you can pay for your really overpriced mono-touch white board with federal grant money. Just write us into your grant.

**Technology.** Here's another word that is easy to carelessly toss into a sentence, whilst forgetting that flint arrowheads and staplers were, at one point, cutting edge technology. Technology works far better when guided with another word, like personal as in personal technology or educational technology or early childhood technology.

This vocabulary problem is the price we all pay for living during a time of tech-fueled change. With time and scholarly discourse, our collective vocabulary will settle, as the larger culture assimilates, accommodates. In other words, it may be a while before we all know what we're talking about. In the meantime it's fun to sit by the sidelines and watch the words bounce around.

At E3, the Wii became the Wii U, the PSP the Vita, and Toshiba just released the Thrive Tablet. Apple stores double as funny word generators. Listen as one of the clerks (geniuses) sells a new computer (Mac Book) to a PC user. Over at the counter (the genius bar) they call a wire thunderbolt and an operating system lion.

Perhaps we can take comfort in the fact that we're living in a time when we can make up our own word, like wired or geek, gadgets and bits, -- the last two the names of technology blogs in the New York Times. At CTR, we like to call new products dust or magic. All these words are fun to drop in a conversation. Just be careful not to say OMG around a 15-year old.