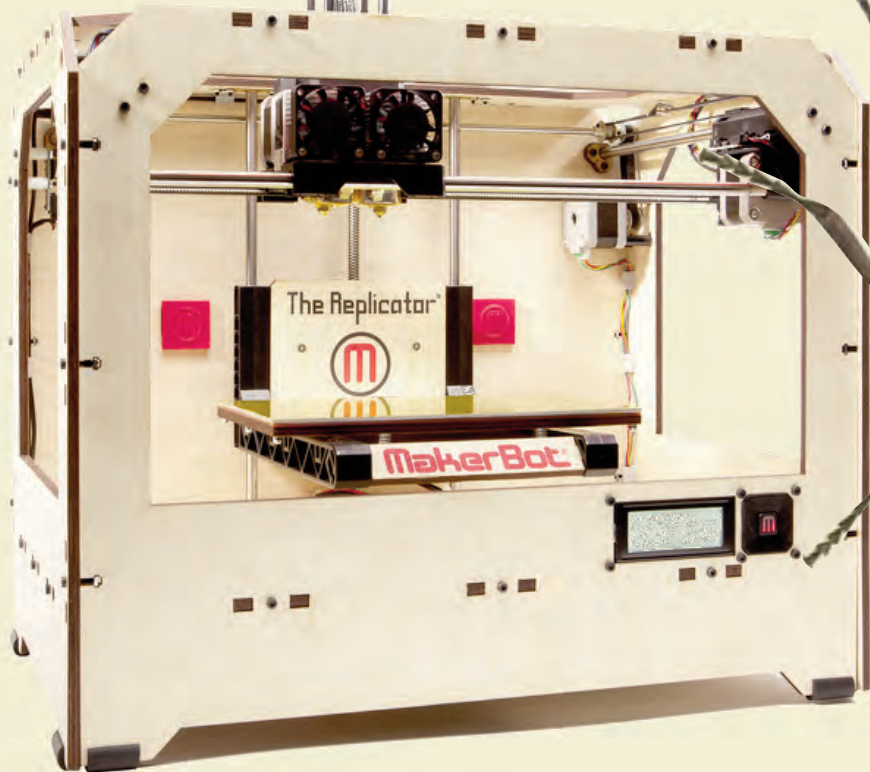




Children's TECHNOLOGY Review™

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- FAQs about the Replicator 3D Printer (p. 19)
- Labeling your iPad for classroom use (p. 4)
- More amazing new apps, like Bugs & Buttons (p. 6)



Makers, Bugs & iPads in ECE

Children's Technology Review

February 2012

Vol. 20, No 2, Issue 143

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Let's Work Together to Make Young Makers

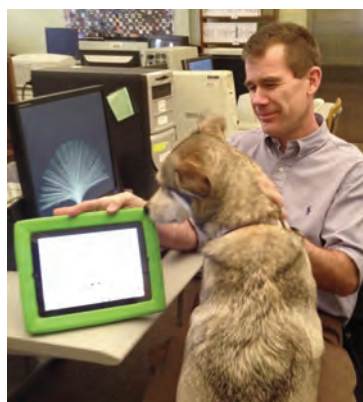
Last month at CES, I met Dale Dougherty; a very smart publisher who co-founded O'Reilly Media. He's one of the driving forces behind both MAKE magazine and the Makerfaire shows. Here's his talk at Kid's at Play <http://youtu.be/FO8my2HNgzc>. Dale reminded us all that children are born to take things apart and put them together again; a notion that lies at the heart of constructivism -- and our evaluation instrument. That's why we picked "Children as Makers" as our topic for this month's LittleClickers column on page 3. You can find a wonderful set of videos (don't miss the singing fish car) and links to help us all "Make Makers." You can also learn more about one of the first relatively low cost 3D printers, the Replicator, on page 19.

iPads in Kindergarten

We just finished a short series of videos with "The iPad Teacher" at <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDE5C25B50EF55422>. His real name is Chris Crowell, CTR's Contributing Editor, and he



earned his moniker from the children of Desmares Elementary School, where he has been a kindergarten teacher, sans iPad, for 14 years. This last year -- his 15th -- he's been experimenting with an iPad 2, thanks to a training project we've been working on with the Acelaro Head Start, and an upcoming trip to North Dakota. Perhaps his biggest message is this: young children today are growing up with touch screens. They don't need to be subjected to a series of lessons about



This picture was taken in Mediatech, not a Kindergarten, where anyone can visit -- even an occasional dog.



how to use one. Instead, let them experiment with a collection of carefully selected apps and use guided exploration to introduce features, such as the camera and/or the microphone. Model the behaviors you want. "The great thing about the iPad is that it promotes exploration."

Here are the video topics:

1. Introducing the iPad for the first time. How to charge it, how to store it, and most importantly, what not do.
2. Using the camera.
3. Care and feeding of the iPad.
4. Do things ever go wrong?
5. How to introduce a new app.

Take a closer look at our prototype iPad, on page 4.

February 2012

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- We're transparent; disclosing sources of potential bias and our review instrument.

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CHILDREN AS MAKERS

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Spring is a great time to make things, and the Internet has thousands of ideas. The first place to visit is Make Magazine, which has a page just for kids. See <http://makeprojects.com/c/Kids>. You can make ice cube crayons or a giant spin art machine (pictured above). Another site is <http://www.youngmakers.org> where you can meet other kids who like to make things, and share expensive tools. By the way, don't use any tool without your parent's permission. Here are more links.

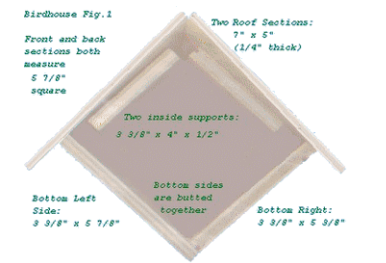
1. What tools should I have in my workshop? Look at the pictures in the New York Times article <http://bcove.me/ubctgkfn> and you can see kids using real tools, to make all sorts of common crafts. Teachers, here's an article on how to setup a woodworking corner in your classroom <http://bit.ly/zRDF9V>.



2. How can I make my own pumpkin? One of the best DIY (do it yourself) projects for the spring is a garden. Why not make your own pumpkin, for halloween? All it takes is a few seeds in the right place. Learn how at All About Pumpkins, at <http://www.allaboutpumpkins.com/growing.html>



3. How do I make a birdhouse? First visit a catalog like <http://www.bird-houses101.com/> to see what kind of birds you want to attract. Then modify the plans at <http://www.wikihow.com/Build-a-Birdhouse>



GOOD FOR GROWNUPS AND KIDS

4. How do you make a good YouTube video? Make Magazine offers this guide to making a good YouTube video that is good to watch, for kids or adults See <http://bit.ly/ytT4Up>

YouTube LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Children as Makers

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEB55CD97CCF98B3C>



iPads in Kindergarten

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDE5C25B50EF55422>

“Keep it simple, show kids proper way to handle it, tell them how to use it but let them explore with it. Watch how they are using it, watch how they interact with it. If they get stuck, offer help. Kids quickly learn they can hit the square button and get out of whatever they are in.” Chris Crowell



This is actually our iPad 1, so it doesn't have a camera hole. To make it workshop ready, I labeled the BigGrips foam frame (\$35 from www.biggrrips.com) using a Sharpie, with a black ball point pen for the labels. The most important thing to label is the location of the volume controls. These are very hard for children (and adults) to find and use.

Join a small group of smart people to explore children's interactive design for multi-touch tablets.

When? May 20-22, 2012, Sunday to Tuesday

Where? Asilomar Conference Grounds on the Monterey Peninsula, CA



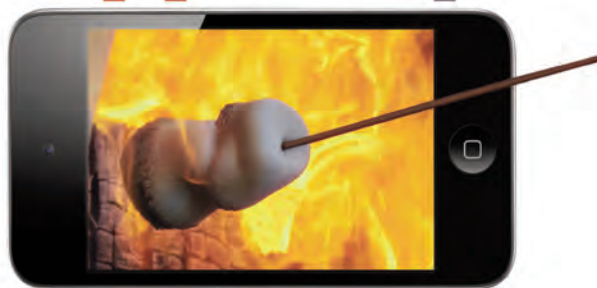
The Sunday feature presentation will be by Theo Gray of Touch Press

Who? Designers, reviewers and researchers in the children's app space, including **Lorraine Akemann** of Moms With Apps; **Daren Carstens** of Carstens Studios; **Barbara Chamberlin**, Director of the University of New Mexico Learning Lab; **Ingrid Moon**, Disney; **Carolyn Hu Flexor**, Duck Duck Moose; **Theodore Gray** of Touch Press and others.

Cost & Registration: \$1290, (\$990 each for 2 or more), not counting Asilomar housing (~\$136/night) or optional UPENN Graduate Credit (\$100).

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Feature Reviews

FEBRUARY 2012

Here's an alphabetical listing of new products, along with a full review, specific ratings and tester feedback. The "Entry Date" refers to the date we first learned of the product.

Adventures of Robin Hood, The

New from French publisher So Ouat! (now named Chocolapps), a rendition of Adventures of Robin Hood, in the form of a 25 page / screen retelling of the classic story, complete with pop-up animations, on-screen text and audio narration and a full-screen cartoon video of the story. You select one of seven languages from the main menu (English, French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, German and Russian), making this one of the most international App we've reviewed. The HD version, best for iPad, is \$3.99 and a standard version is \$0.99.

The HD version includes mini-games. Children might find the hooded Robin in a crowd, compete in an archery tournament, and storm Prince John's castle to rescue Maid Marian. Other features include: 'touch pronunciation' (touch a word to hear it spoken); "explain to me" (a word's definition and its opposite are given, to provide context for unfamiliar words); "show me" (an illustration displays to represent a word); and "Karaoke reading" (designed to help children learn to read the story themselves).

This is an excellent language experience for any emerging reader.

Details: Chocolapps, www.souat.com. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 5-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: reading (English, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Russian, Dutch and French), decoding, parts of speech. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 1/25/2012. [WB]

Barbie: Jet, Set & Style

Turn your living room screen into a hair and nail salon, with this mix-and-match type of creativity experience. It's a good idea, but the actual creativity options are limited to mix-and-match items. For example, to cut hair, you are required to press a series of buttons on the Wii controller (the version we tested). This causes an exact section of hair to be snipped off, with no margin of error. It might look good, but where's the creativity if the hair is always perfect?

In the story, Barbie is running an operation called Jet, Set & Style Inc. You will travel around the world on the Barbie Jet Salon to do hair, nails and to consult on fashion advice. As you play, you earn "fashionista points" which can be used for the chance to style Barbie herself, for a show in Milan. Also available for the Nintendo DS for \$20. Developed by Game Machine Studios for THQ.

Details: THQ, Inc., . Price: \$30. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Wii, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: fashion, some creativity, clothing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.2 stars. Entry date: 9/20/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9
Educational	10
Entertaining	8
Design Features	9
Good Value	9

90%



Ease of Use	7
Educational	7
Entertaining	6
Design Features	6
Good Value	6

64%





Batman: The Brave and the Bold

A creative twist on fighting games, this cartoon adventure contains excellent music and fast-paced sidescrolling, with plenty of fights in between. On the DS, all the dialog requires reading, which makes this a language enrichment activity, as well.

Despite a few bottlenecks, this is a fun game. Created by WayForward for Warner Bros. The Wii version costs \$40; \$30 for the Nintendo DS. Available in three languages (English, French or Spanish).

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Wii, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, mazes, some reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 8/31/2010. [WB]

Ease of Use	7	80%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	9	

ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Cartoon Violence, Comic Mischief



Beanie Ballz Bounce

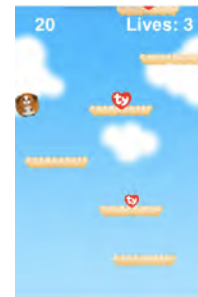
Beanie Baby lovers now have an app of their own, in the form of Beanie Ballz Bounce. Designed for the iOS smaller screens, the free app is a bit like Doodle Jump, only backwards.

Instead of bouncing higher, you drop down, from platform to platform, earning points by collecting Ty labels. The labels look like Ty "heart" tags, so there could be an informal collecting message. You also have to avoid Beanie Monsters who sit on some of the platforms. If you make it to the bottom, you unlock the next level. There are four levels total. Features include the ability to toggle the background music on or off.

Created by Fun Nugget for Ty, Inc. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUBT_Xc8M1s

Details: Ty, Inc., www.ty.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: gross motor skills, timing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 2/7/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	84%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	10	



Bugs and Buttons

Once you get past the idea of touching the swarms of realistic roaches, ants, or bees, children quickly fall for this collection of 18 counting and classification activities. Teachers do as well. Why? Because of the way it playfully engages children's early math and logic skills, of the variety that lie at the root of their future math learning. Oh, and there's also a set of peaceful buttons, to counteract the creepiness of the bugs.

There are two modes. You can move through a series of well designed structured challenges progressively (progress for one player is bookmarked), or you can freely explore.

Management features include the ability to toggle on/off scores, achievements, visual instructions, extended introduction or the background music; all classroom friendly features. The leveling causes the app to get easier if a child struggles. A "bonus mode" presents the hardest challenge.

From basics to advanced, Bugs and Buttons is packed with early math and logic skills. Some that we noted include interactive counting, fast paced sorting, problem solving with path finding, and fine motor skills like pinching and pulling. Several of the activities use the multi-touch features of iPad to make the game great huddleware (for a small group). All in all, there's a nice balance of didactic challenge, mixed with open-ended play in this app, with classroom friendly features that will make any teacher smile. Apps like this help remind you why you invested in an iPad.

Details: Little Bit Studio, LLC, www.littlebitstudio.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: *iPad, iPod touch, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor coordination, racing, classifying, counting, letter recognition, science, math, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 1/16/2012. [CC]

Ease of Use	8	94%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	10	





Deepak Chopra's Leela

Are you ready to "enhance your mind-body connection?" Drop this DVD into your Xbox Kinect system, and you'll have your own Indian meditation guru, at your service. The game is organized into seven types of meditations, each designed to help you focus and connect to your personal "flow state." We tried it and it is certainly possible, although it helps to have a quiet room and a bit of undisturbed time. Each activity is introduced by Deepak Chopra, the relaxation expert best known for a long association with Michael Jackson.

There are seven lessons, each introduced by Chopra's relaxing, authoritative voice coaching you to relax-- "imagine the air as water." As you meditate you are treated to beautiful screen-saver like art that can be influenced by your motion (you control the graphics by leaning left and right). One gripe -- you can't exit from an activity once it has started, say, if the phone rings. It is possible to make your own "mandala" or kaleidoscope-style circle art work which can be saved and shared on Facebook.

If you're looking for a quiet and introspective video game, have a look at this one. Created by CuriousPictures for THQ.

Details: THQ, Inc., . Price: \$40. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect, Wii. Teaches/Purpose: introspection, movement, meditation. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 2/6/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	8
Educational	9
Entertaining	9
Design Features	9
Good Value	8

86%

ESRB Rating: Everyone



Dora & Kai-lan's Pet Shelter

Games that let you taking care of virtual animals are nothing new. But one that features Dora & Kai-lan as the caretakers brings a fun new twist to the genre. Your child can help Dora and Kai-lan perform vet checkups, bathe, feed, groom, and potty-train the animals, who do tricks for thanks.

Each job is broken down, step-by-step. In order to fill a water dish, you have to draw small circles on the lower screen. To dry your pet, you blow into the microphone, or connect dots in the right order.

Animals include bunnies, birds, puppies and kittens. Features include the ability to save up to three games. The microphone is also used (e.g., say hi to the new pet). Weaknesses include some excessive Dora narration and a tendency to trap you inside some of the games, but they are short so this is a minimal problem. Children can also play backyard games, dress-up the pets, and teach them tricks to earn treats, toys, and hats. Developed by Black Lantern for 2K Play.

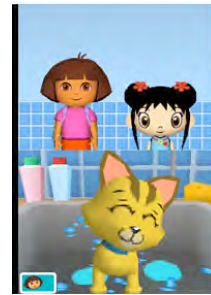
Details: 2K play, www.2kgames.com/2kplay/. Price: \$30. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, following directions, fine motor coordination . Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 11/16/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	8
Educational	9
Entertaining	9
Design Features	8
Good Value	9

86%



ESRB Rating: Everyone



Eddy's Number Party, The

Solid but dry, this app is true to practices of behavioral teaching: offering up stickers in exchange for patiently slogging through sets of counting tasks.

There are four levels, ranging from counting (drag a set of balloons to the matching numeral) to a game of concentration that involves matching sets of dots to numerals. The better a child does, the harder the problems become, and progress is tracked in a management section.

Correct answers earn stickers, although it is not always obvious from a learner's perspective where you are in a level. The management section lets you toggle the background music on or off. For those in search of squeaky clean math pedagogy with stickers as rewards, this app is worth a look. Just make sure you don't have Angry Birds on the same computer. If you're looking for a carefully leveled counting and adding app (Pre-K and K) this app is certainly worth a look.

Details: Scientific Learning, . Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math, counting, matching memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 10/24/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	10
Educational	9
Entertaining	4
Design Features	8
Good Value	9

80%





Frogger 3D

Those frogs can now jump right out of your 3DS screen, in this new edition of the classic arcade game.

The only problem is that many of the puzzles use a top-down view with graphics that are so small you can't time your jumps easily, creating a game that is challenging for the wrong reasons.

Still, the 3D graphics are impressive, especially at first. Content includes six worlds to hop through, including New York, the Far East, and Space. There are 60 stages in all, each with multiple road crossing challenges that get harder. Along the way, you meet other frogs who might destroy obstacles, absorb damage or light the way in dark spaces as you progress through the game.

Features include the ability to compete against other players in 4-player multiplayer over wireless, engage in street battles, and show off your skills in the new Forever Mode. Developed by Alpha-Unit Co. Ltd. for Konami. Testers said "this is an interesting twist on a classic game. It is fun enough for the first level or so, but gets old."

Details: Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc., www.konami.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, timing, logic, problem solving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 2/6/2012. [WB]

Just Dance Kids 2

New and improved, this second Just Dance Kids contains 40 new dances for 1 to 4 players, plus some new platform options (the last version was Wii only). The dances are lead by a squad of real kids, who model the easy-to-learn moves. We noticed that the models were girls (at least in the first level), making us think that this might be a girls title.

Content includes songs from The Wiggles and Yo Yo Gabba, as well as covers of popular songs including Whip My Hair, Just the Way You Are and Burning Up. A shuffle mode lets you select your favorite songs for non-stop dancing, and there's a playlist option, say, for a party. The Wii version features a four player cooperative mode, as well as a Balloon Mode where kids compete against each other to get more items and earn more points by shaking their Wii Remotes.

The Kinect version tracks kids movements with the sensor and features a Create mode that lets kids star in their own music video and create their own original dances for any song.

The Playstation Move version lets kids capture their dance moves using the PS3 camera to snap photos while dancing, and can be played with up to four players. It is still possible to randomly jump around and get points, however, this title deserved a "most improved" citation, for having smoother features than the last edition.

Details: Ubisoft, Inc., www.ubisoft.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 4-up. Platform: Wii, Xbox Kinect, PlayStation Move. Teaches/Purpose: dance, rhythm, exercise. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 11/15/2011. [WB]

LetterReflex

New from BinaryLabs (makers of Dexteria), LetterReflex takes on the common issue of letter reversals. The app features kinesthetic learning techniques to help kids tell the difference between b's and d's, as well as other commonly reversed letters and words.

While letter reversals are developmentally appropriate and normal for girls until the end of first grade and boys through the beginning of second grade, LetterReflex addresses the topic in a low pressure way. Our testers -- early elementary students -- were very engaged while playing, and then showed a strong recall of the lessons learned when writing words and stories in later pencil and paper tasks.

Adults and older students who tried LetterReflex commented: "This is how I see the words sometimes" (in FlipIt). While geared towards children, LetterReflex is an app that adults who have quietly struggled with letter and word reversals can use. LetterReflex is a good app to know about.

Details: BinaryLabs, Inc., www.binarylabs.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: *iPad, iPhone, iPod touch. Teaches/Purpose: letter recognition, decoding, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 1/16/2012. [CC]

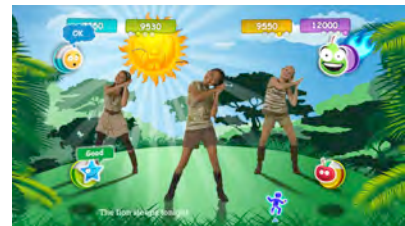
Ease of Use	6	76%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	9	

ESRB Rating: Everyone, Animated Blood
Cartoon Violence



Ease of Use	8	88%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	

ESRB Rating: Everyone



Ease of Use	8	88%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	9	





Madden NFL Football (3DS)

Fun, fast and designed to offer streamlined play, this pocket-sized edition of Madden NFL for the Nintendo 3DS brings virtual football to the 3D screen. It's a small screen, though, and it took our testers (ages 15, 18 and adult) awhile to adjust to the 3D graphics.

Content includes 32 NFL teams and stadiums, with three types of playcalling. GameFlow automatically selects the best play for the situation based on authentic NFL team gameplans; Arcade gives you more control over plays; and Classic lets you experience your favorite team's playbook.

There are both 11-on-11 games, or 5-on-5 games that have no penalties and no play clock -- the winner is the first team to score a set number of touchdowns. Utilizing the 3DS touch screen, you can draw up your own plays on the fly to create the ultimate line of scrimmage. All in all, this is a very nicely designed football simulation.

Details: EA Sports (Electronic Arts Inc.), www.eagames.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: football, sports. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 10/13/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	88%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	



ESRB Rating: Everyone



Moxie Girlz

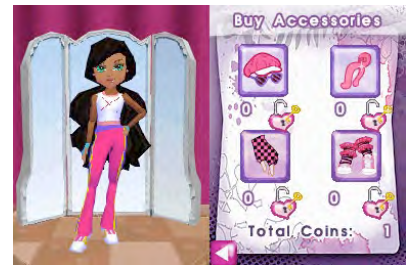
Here's a mix-and-match activity that turns you into the editor of a fashion magazine. You can dress your Moxie Girlz dolls by trying different outfits, hair, eye color and so on. Next, you stage a photo shoot, and take different photos, earning money that can be used to buy more accessories. The background music is a bit overbearing, as are the gender specific themes. The creativity doesn't get beyond multiple choice.

Features include journal and diary options, Moxie Girlz quizzes and the ability to add your own photo to the game, providing you have a DSi (with a camera). All modes and gameplay focus on the "positive Moxie Girlz message of Be true! Be you!" (as long as you look like a model). Developed by 1st Playable for GameMill.

Details: GameMill Entertainment, LLC, www.game-mill.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 5-7. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, writing, some reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 10/25/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	78%
Educational	6	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	

ESRB Rating: Everyone



Out-A-Bout

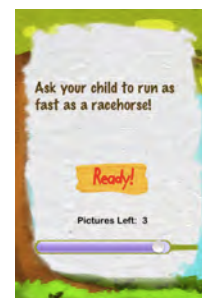
A good concept with poor design elements, this mad-lib style story leverages the power of your iPhone or iPod touch camera and microphone to let you create a custom 12 screen ebook featuring your child's name and photo, framed in a nature theme.

You start by creating a profile. Parents and children then receive 12 prompts to perform certain outdoor, physical activities like running, jumping or finding a smooth stone. Using the iPhone/iPod, parents take still photographs of their children engaged in the activities, and the photographs are uploaded into a pre-developed story narrative for subsequent viewing, reading together, and conversation. The app is designed to be used by teachers or parents with the children, and not by the children themselves, serving as a prop to encourage physical activity. This is a noble idea, however there's nothing to keep you from using the regular camera feature to record a child using objects that they find interesting, or moving the way they want, and asking them to describe what's going on (in their words).

Weaknesses include an inability to mute the looping background music and/or control the sound volume, which swells when you are about to take a photo. Also, you can't switch between the front and back facing cameras and once you've started a story, and you can't pause or go back to the menu, trapping you in the process of completing all 12 pages. Because you're trapped, you increase the chances of an early ending.

Details: Fred Rogers Center, www.fredrogerscenter.org. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-5. Platform: iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: nature, language, physical activity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.2 stars. Entry date: 1/17/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	64%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	5	
Good Value	2	





Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions

Back in the 1980s these six classic video games earned a lot of quarters. Today, all six come on a cartridge the size of a quarter. What's more, they're in 3D. The catch is that they'll only run on the Nintendo 3DS. The other drawback is while the graphics look amazing in 3D, the games were designed to be played on TV sized screens. When viewed on the iPhone-sized 3DS screen, Pac Man looks the like head of a pin.

Each of the five games has been nicely modernized, and they still have their addicting charm. Titles include Pac-Man, Pac-Man Championship Edition, Galaga, and Galaga Legions, along with two new 3DS only games.

In Pac-Man Tilt, you move Pac-Man through stages filled with obstacles, platforms and ghosts with tilt controls. You use flippers, platforms and power pellets to jump, flip, swing, and eat through to the finish line.

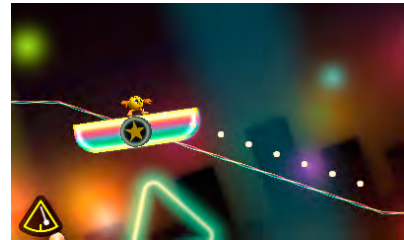
In Galaga 3D Impact, the 3DS becomes a ship's gun turret as you attack and defend the ship while ridding space of the incoming Galaga army.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., www.namcobandaigames.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, timing, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 7/22/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	8
Educational	N
Entertaining	8
Design Features	9
Good Value	8

83%

ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Comic Mischief, Fantasy Violence



PES 2012: Pro Evolution Soccer

Looking for a serious soccer game? Pro Evolution Soccer (PES) delivers plenty of sharp, realistic graphics and mixes it in with a set of intuitive controls. The only drawback is that the setup process is complicated, so if you're looking for a quick game of soccer, this isn't the best choice.

2012 features include a more detailed career mode, improved teammate AI (artificial intelligence) so the players work better, better zonal marking and positional defending, and a new collision detection system.

The result is one of the best ever PES titles we've seen, for 1 to 4 players (2 to 8 online).

Details: Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc., www.konami.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 10-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Wii, Xbox 360, PSP, PlayStation 2. Teaches/Purpose: sports, soccer. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 9/30/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	5
Educational	9
Entertaining	10
Design Features	10
Good Value	9

86%



ESRB Rating: Everyone





Playful Minds: Math

Want to see what the home-based math curriculum of the iPad age looks like? Designed by the highly regarded French app developer, GameLoft, Playful Minds is a well-designed \$3 iPad-based math curriculum that packs a punch. You get a leveled, K-2 math curriculum, mixed with an assessment system along with a set of arcade-like games to reinforce the content -- all for the price of a cup of coffee (that's nice coffee, for our office).

After you login (with an email address) you see a series of islands, each with an animal professor host, along with a game-board. Each stop represents a new set of problems. This visual metaphor works nicely, helping children know where they are in their math education. The problems are mostly multiple choice or correct answer. They've been pulled from "Skill Sharpeners Math" -- one of many inspired by the NCTM standards for K-2. Content includes 300 exercises and mini-games organized around Algebra, Geometry, Data Analysis, Measurement, and Numbers & Operations. Directions and explanations are displayed in print and by narrator; the app can handle up to five children. Features include the ability to adjust sounds and toggle between US or UK English.

While the initial cost (\$3) is low, consider also that your child will encounter in-app sales in the store. Here's how that works: as they play, children earn items such as clothing for their avatar. In the store, they are shown better items, sold for more coins. They are sold in units of 1000's and cost roughly \$2 for a complete set of clothing. It is possible to buy \$100 worth of coins. To gain access to the progress reports, you need 10,000 coins; about \$10. All things considered, the price seems reasonable, and it is possible to play through the games unhindered by in-app sales. But it is important for you and your children to know how these types of apps make money.

The activities are well designed -- very clean, and fairly high in child control. Children can escape at any point, and they can see where they are in the curriculum. The main drawback is that there is a rather narrow window of time in a child's development when starting this app makes sense. All in all, this is an important new app to keep an eye on. We'll hope to see more in the series.

Details: GameLoft, www.gameloft.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 5-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: math, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 1/19/2012. [WB]

Power Rangers Samurai

Easy to play, and full of action, this fascinating mashup from vintage 1980 cartoon super heroes combines actual footage from the Power Rangers TV show with a well designed fighting format for one or two players. It makes it fun and easy to beat up hundreds, if not thousands of bad guys in a single afternoon. Note that the violence is cartoon style, and the defeated enemies fade away. But you are using weapons which could be offensive to some.

In the DS version you use your stylus, and in the Wii version your Wii Remote as your sword to morph into a Red, Blue, Green, Yellow or Pink Ranger. Each has different properties, required to defeat each enemy. There's a lot to explore -- You can unlock secret passageways, access hidden levers, and follow mystical pathways to get hints on how to defeat the MegaMonster. Prices are \$30 for the Nintendo DS version and \$40 for the Wii version.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., . Price: \$30. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Nintendo DS, Wii. Teaches/Purpose: fighting, timing, strategy, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 10/27/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	92%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	9	



Ease of Use	8	88%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	

ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Comic Mischief, Fantasy Violence





Professor Layton and the Last Specter

This one player problem solving adventure is rich with mental stimulation, and high quality graphics and narration.

The fourth in the Professor Layton puzzle series, this game is set three years before the events in Professor Layton and the Curious Village. In the story, Professor Layton receives a letter from an old schoolmate telling him that a mysterious giant is destroying his town. This time, the professor investigates with his young, smart new assistant, Emmy.

After a long introduction (which can be skipped with the "start" button) you start to solve the puzzles, which can be very challenging. There's a wide variety of brain teasers and riddles; more than the others in the series. In the first, for example, you find a hidden clue by taking the first letter from each line, in a paragraph. Fortunately, there's a good hint system. If you know a smart older child (upper elementary, middle or high school) this is an excellent enrichment title. Developed by Level-5 for Nintendo.

Details: Nintendo of America, Inc., www.nintendo.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, memory, strategy. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 9/14/2011. [WB]

Rhythm Heaven Fever

Like it's Nintendo DS predecessor, Rhythm Feature (CTR April 2009), this Wii edition is both fun and addicting, and it presents an outstanding way to experience the beat of different songs.

After you choose one of the four game save slots to save your progress, you can take the tutorial, which is recommended, to learn how to master each one of the 50 levels.

This requires expertly matching button presses on the Wii controller with events on the screen to make parts on an assembly line or sink golf shots. If you hit the target beats, you are rewarded with an enhanced version of the song. This game is a classic embodiment of the old phrase: easy to learn, tough to master.

Features include some additional 2-player rhythm games. Note that all the games are new to this version, although people who have played the Nintendo DS game might recognize familiar characters. Much of the music was created by the Japanese pop music producer TSUNKU. Developed by Nintendo and TNX.

The bottom line -- if you're looking for an excellent way to develop beat competency, look no further than Rhythm Heaven Fever.


Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: rhythm, music, beat. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 2/1/2012. [WB]

Spot the Dot

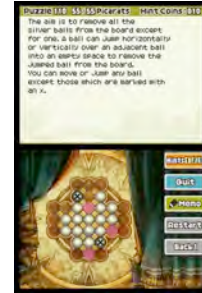
How do you turn a children's book into a lively, engaging experience? Here's an outstanding example. Based on the book by David Carter, Spot the Dot is a "needle in the haystack" or "I Spy" type of app, where the same item -- a small colored dot, is hidden in nine pages, or screens. Each challenge is presented with the text "can you spot the (color) dot?" forming a predictable pattern. On some pages the dot is hidden in a moving illustration, and the dot moves around, extending the utility of this app, despite the limited number of pages. USES: Great for huddleware, and for supporting math, language and logic; invites toddlers and preschoolers to learn colors as they play 'spot to dot.' Created for Ruckus Media by Unicornlabs.

Details: Ruckus Media Group, www.ruckusmediagroup.com. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 10/17/2011. [WB]


Ease of Use	8	92%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	10	



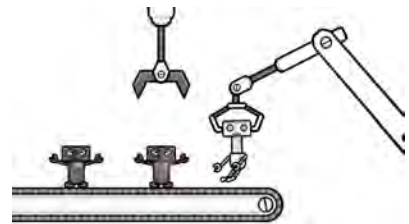
ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Alcohol Ref., Mild Violence, Simulated Gambling




Ease of Use	8	94%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	10	



ESRB Rating: Everyone, Mild Cartoon Violence



Ease of Use	9	96%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	10	






Team Umizoomi


Ideal for preschool and kindergarten-age children, this one player problem solving adventure features Milli, Geo, and Bot from the Umizoomi Nickelodeon show.

In order to rebuild a submarine, children move through 25 activities that consist of mazes and puzzles, some of which involve using your voice as an input. There are two modes: adventure (move through the games in the context of the story) and team training (choose one of the 25 mini-games individually).

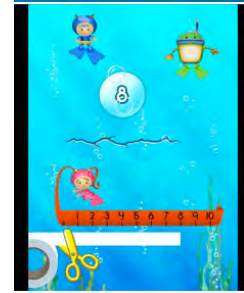
Weaknesses include some repetitive instructions and it is instantly obvious how you get out of a game once you get into it. The background music gets repetitive, but it can be adjusted in the preferences.

The activities are generally well designed, and the tasks match the show. Curriculum is based on the Pre-K and Kindergarten math skills, which includes counting, sorting, matching, identifying, sequencing, adding, subtracting, dividing, measuring and comparing. Developed by Black Lantern for 2K Play.

Details: 2K play, www.2kgames.com/2kplay/. Price: \$30. Ages: 3-6. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, some reading, math, counting, fine motor skills. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 11/16/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	7	86%	
Educational	9		
Entertaining	10		
Design Features	9		
Good Value	8		

ESRB Rating: Early Childhood





Future Releases & Updates

FEBRUARY 2012

This section contains a listing of products in the process of being reviewed, but not yet rated. We also include significant updates of older products.

Air Hogs R/C Hawk Eye Blue Sky

Expensive and hard to fly, this remote controlled camera plane lets you take hundreds of pictures or up to five minutes of video while flying. Designed for outdoor use, you simply charge the plane with the controller or by hooking it up to your computer, hand launch and let it fly. Includes 1 Hawk Eye Blue Sky, 1 USB Cord, and 1 Controller. Requires 6 AA batteries, not included, but it can also charge from your computer.

Details: Spin Master Ltd., www.spinmaster.com. Price: \$65. Ages: 12-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: flying, photography, controlling an airplane. Entry date: 11/16/2011.



Beginning Operations Adventures Interactive Activities

Designed especially with interactive white boards in mind, this set of four math games include a drive-through diner, a lemonade stand and an apple orchard that provide practice with beginning operations concepts, including addition and subtraction facts for numbers 1-12. Players follow simple audio instructions to work through each problem right on the screen—as they pick apples from the trees, or grab cookies from the baking sheet. Includes printable pre- & post-assessments to track students' progress. Prices are available for both one and five computers.

Details: Lakeshore Learning Materials, www.lakeshorelearning.com. Price: \$19.99. Ages: 4-6. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: math. Entry date: 2/1/2012.



Activity 2: Subtract at the Lemonade Stand

Disney Spotlight Mic

Designed to bring karaoke to the iPad, the wireless Disney Spotlight Mic and karaoke app lets you sing along to your favorite songs with built-in pitch enhancement.

Streaming lyrics cue you when to sing. You can turn song vocals up if you need to hear them, or down if you're ready to take the lead. Vocal effects include reverb, tone and echo, and a set of vocal lessons show you how to sound your best, with vocal warm-ups and tips.

It is possible to record audio and video using the iPad 2 camera and upload and share.

Content includes 10 original Disney songs, "pitch enhancement" (also called auto-tune), scrolling lyrics, and the ability to purchase additional songs.

Details: First Act Music, www.firstact.com. Price: \$100. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: music, singing, language, pitch, rhythm. Entry date: 11/25/2011.





DreamBox Learning Math

January 2012: Dreambox has expanded the 3rd grade level ("double the size") and released 100 new lessons covering 4th grade, covering the common core standards.

April 2010: Dreambox released a third grade component, with 120 new lessons. There will be no increase in price.

February 2009: What do you get when you cross former Microsoft executives with some dedicated math educators? A state-of-the-art online math curriculum (\$13/month at www.dreambox.com). We tried the free two-week trial option and found the first 20 or so of the 350 activities to be well-designed and engaging. The lessons are designed to function as a stand alone math curriculum, say for a home school situation, or they could supplement an existing school curriculum. Because the lessons are designed and delivered in Flash, you can run them from from any Macintosh or Windows browser. No disks, downloads or installations required.

First, a parent or teacher needs to make an account. Next, children log in with their screen name and password. There's the one-time process of choosing an avatar (there is one in a wheelchair), followed by a tutorial on how to use the mouse. From there, it's on to a cartoon-like world, made of four themes: Pirates, Dinosaurs, Pets, or Pixies. Progress is monitored by a management system that tracks a child's progress and controls the difficulty, hints, pace, and sequence of the lessons. Adults can log in at any time to check a child's progress; an email reporting option is also available.

The best part of this curriculum is the way the activities are designed. Rather than just click right answers, children are often asked to build answers, perhaps estimating how many sheep will fit in a pen (calculating area) or dragging and dropping markers onto a base-ten grid to match a quantity. Wrong answers are presented with more concrete representations of the answer, in the form of a number line or set of objects, for example. As they work through an exercise, children can see how many problems remain. In one game, each problem causes a dinosaur's neck to stretch. So children naturally want to see what happens when it reaches all the way across the screen. Finally we liked how it is possible to skip over the instructions, or replay them if needed. The choice is yours.

Completing games earns coins, which can be used at a carnival arcade, with games like skeet ball where you can add up your points. Weaknesses include a clunky drawing activity. All in all, this is a welcome addition to the world of technology-based math curriculum, for parents and schools alike. Note that the price listed is for one month, for one child. For six months, \$50, for one year, \$100. Schools, call about site licenses.

Details: Dreambox Learning, Inc., www.dreambox.com. Price: \$13/month (plus free trial). Ages: 5-9. Platform: Internet service. Teaches/Purpose: math. Entry date: 4/2/2008.





Fantage (www.fantage.com)

Update January 2012: Fantage is starting a school initiative where kids can play math, reading and geography mini-games, and schools can compete for prizes. You don't need to be a subscriber in order to enter the contest.

Update July 2010: Fantage now offers 25 Flash-based games and adventures that allow you to earn stars to use to shop for items.

Fantage, or "fantastic age" is a responsive, safe and no-fail MMO that resembles Club Penguin back in the good old days, minus the penguins. It is a case study in ease of use.

The Fantage theme is a bit like Disneyland with nine-themed areas, including a castle, a forest, a lighthouse, uptown, downtown and others. In each you can chat (freely but filtered) with others, invite others to become friends, decorate your room, or play 11 Flash-based games. There's always something to do.

First launched in 2007, Fantage looks like it was inspired by Club Penguin -- there's even a lighthouse and a very similar chat process. Everything is easy to manage, from the registration process on. We liked how quickly our avatar moved from one place to the next. The games vary in quality, but generally offer one player arcade-style action with public leaderboards. These include moving through a maze, popping bubbles and catching bugs. Some are poorly leveled, but you can always exit. The sound can also start looping, but fortunately there's a mute.

As with other virtual worlds, you quickly learn that some things, like upgrading your room, require becoming a premium member for \$6/month and up. When we tested the service, it was already crowded at 8 AM EST, making us think that Fantage is popular in other time zones. If you're looking for a mainstream children's MMO with no surprises, Fantage is a good place to start.

Details: Fantage, www.fantage.com. Price: \$free \$6/month. Ages: 7-14. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: logic, typing, some creativity, spatial relations. Entry date: 9/26/2009.

GarageBand

Turn your iPad, iPhone and iPod touch into a recording studio, complete with a set of touch-driven instruments. Instruments include real-sounding pianos, organs, guitars, drums, and basses.

The music you make can be captured and played back with different sound effects; up to eight tracks can be mixed in the studio. Content includes 9 amps and 10 stompbox effects, two time signatures (3/4 and 6/8 time), the ability to record your voice using the built-in microphone and apply fun sound effects, and a sampler that lets you create an instrument from sounds you record, then play them on a keyboard. Besides the two octave keyboard, there's a guitar fretboard, electric or upright bass and several drum sets.

If you're feeling lazy, you can use one of the 250 professionally prerecorded loops. Songs can be emailed right from GarageBand (AAC), or exported to your iTunes library on your Mac or PC. You can send a project to your Mac and open it in GarageBand to continue refining your song if you like, using the computer version. This is a Universal app designed for iPad, iPhone, and iPod touch.

Details: Apple, www.apple.com. Price: \$5. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: music, creativity. Entry date: 1/22/2012.

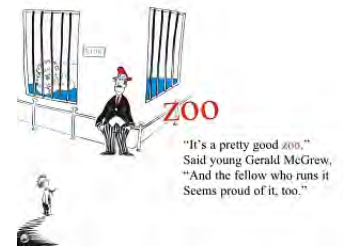




If I Ran the Zoo

As with other Oceanhouse Media titles, If I Ran the Zoo is based on an existing print Dr. Seuss book. In the story, young Gerald McGrew is not impressed by the animals at the zoo and dreams up plans for "New Zoo, McGrew Zoo", featuring the world's most unusual creatures. Animals include a ten-footed lion and a Fizza-ma-Wizza-ma-Dill, "the worlds biggest bird from the island of Gwark, who eats only pine trees and spits out the bark." Features include professional narration, background audio, and enlarged artwork for each scene. In addition, individual words are highlighted as the story is read and words zoom up and are spoken when pictures are touched. There are three ways to read this book: Read to Me — listen to the narrated story with words highlighted as they are read; Read it Myself — read the book in its traditional form; and Auto Play — plays like a movie, automatically reading and turning pages.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch, Android. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Entry date: 1/5/2012.



Just Dance 3

Now available for the Xbox Kinect, Just Dance 3 features 40 new tracks including Party Rock Anthem by LMAFO, California Gurlz by Katy Perry, and Forget You by Cee Lo Green. It is an easy to use, well designed dance simulation.

Now four players can dance simultaneously, providing your living room is big enough. A new Just Create mode lets players record their own dance to the songs featured in the game, and then play each creation like a normal game mode and share it online for others to download to their own Xbox 360.

The Coach Me mode is designed for players to copy the original dance choreography of a song by following the on-screen coach. The Dance Off mode is for one to four players and remixes the Just Dance choreography with one of your own. Players follow along with the Just Dance Coach, but must be prepared to record their own dance moves during the song, and then can play them back later in the song. In Freestyle Mode, you don't have to follow the Just Dance Coach but can create your own moves. Developed by Ubisoft Montreal.

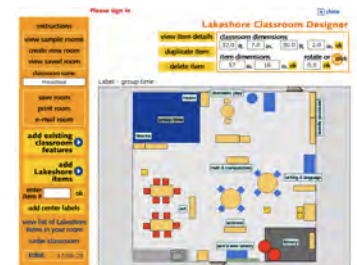
Details: Ubisoft, Inc. . Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: dancing, music, rhythm. Entry date: 6/6/2011.



Lakeshore Classroom Designer

Designing a classroom? This useful Flash-based utility, which opens in a popup window in your browser, (here - <http://bit.ly/iixQJe>) lets you drag and drop classroom elements such as chairs, rugs and shelves around, using your mouse (a lot easier than the real items!). You can use a set of generic materials, or Lakeshore Learning specific items. The catch? You have to register to save your room layout, and if you print your plan, it comes with all the Lakeshore Learning item numbers. In all, a pretty painless price for such a valuable tool. Designed in Flash, runs on Windows or Mac computers. Visit http://www.lakeshorelearning.com/classroom_designer/cd_launch.jsp?popup=yes.

Details: Lakeshore Learning, . Price: \$free. Ages: NA. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: a utility for designing a classroom. Entry date: 2/1/2012.





LEGO Harry Potter Years 5-7

The follow up to last year's LEGO Harry Potter Years 1-4, this game is based on the last three Harry Potter books and the final four films. The game takes you through Harry Potter's adventures in the Muggle and wizarding worlds, from Privet Drive in Little Whinging to Diagon Alley, Hogsmeade and Hogwarts, as well as new locations including Grimmauld Place, the Ministry of Magic, and Godric's Hollow. You will encounter new faces, challenges and magic as you prepare for the ultimate battle against Lord Voldemort. The game builds upon the gameplay, lessons and potion-making skills learned in LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4 to equip you with the tools necessary to challenge new and old enemies (including He Who Must Not Be Named). Created by TT games for Warner Bros.



Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii, Nintendo DS, Nintendo 3DS, PSP, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: . Entry date: 6/7/2011.

Proloquo2Go

Proloquo is a multilingual speech solution for Mac OS X for (AAC) for people who cannot speak. The App version is called Proloquo2Go.

The app can have several functions: including to provide speech feedback in any application while typing for children and people with learning disabilities, to serve as a talking word processor, to provides text to speech for people who prefer listening to reading, and to help with the pronunciation of foreign languages. The app uses the same multilingual speech engine that is used for the KeyStrokes on-screen keyboard and the SwitchXS switch access solution. There are settings for both British or American English.

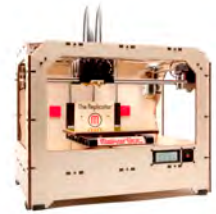
Details: Assistiveware, www.assistiveware.com. Price: \$189.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: Speech therapy, communication, special needs. Entry date: 2/7/2012.





Replicator

The Replicator is a \$1750 3D printer made by the Brooklyn-based startup Makerbot (www.makerbot.com), and they are now available to be ordered (as of February 2012). The device is historic for several reasons: First, this is the first time an assembled 3D printer has broken the \$2000 barrier, with higher resolution and a lower price than last year's Thing-O-Matic. It can also make bigger items, as large as a football (up to 8.9 x 5.7 x 5.9 inches). I had the chance to try one at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas on January 12, 2012. Here's more about what the Replicator can and can't do. You can see the video from my visit, here <http://youtu.be/sqorBvxNEXQ>.



Q. Traditional printers consumer paper and ink. What does a 3D printer use? Spools of coiled ABS (acrylonitrile butadiene styrene) plastic that costs about \$45 each per kg. This is the same material that is used to make Lego blocks -- it is strong, safe, and comes in many colors. One spool can make about 176 chess pieces. The printer can also work with PLA (polylactic acid), a bio-plastic made from corn. More on that, here. <http://wiki.makerbot.com/pla>.

Q. So is it expensive? The cost seems reasonable, which is one reason there's so much excitement about this device. Each chess piece costs roughly \$.25, not counting the electricity. You can buy refills online, from non-MakerBot sources.

Q. How long does it take to make a plastic chess piece? This is not a printer for those who need immediate gratification. Plan on 30 minutes to finish a chess piece. Larger, more dense objects might take several hours. The more plastic, the more time.

Q. What happens if I trip over the power cable in the middle of a job? This happened in our demo, but damage is limited to your current project. You just clean off the old plastic and start over.

Q. Do I need a computer? If you want to make something original, yes. You use an open source design package called ReplicatorG software that you can download free for Mac, Windows or Linux, at <http://replicat.org>. You can also use 3D design software like Google Sketch Up (free) or other CAD software like Solid Works. That will give you an STL file that you run through ReplicatorG. Then it goes on the SD card and into the MakerBot. If you're feeling lazy, you can download or modify somebody else's idea, from www.thingiverse.com. Once you've made your design, save it to an SD card or USB drive and plug it into the side of the printer. You choose your projects from a menu, the printer's onboard computer takes it from there.

Q. Does the printer smell or give off fumes? The melted ABS plastic gives no smell that I could detect, although MakerBot recommends using the printer in a ventilated area. The plastic is non-toxic.

Q. Is it dangerous? The extruders get hot but are hard to reach. The base also gets hot, but not enough to burn you. If your kids use hot glue guns, you're exposing them to about the same level of risk.

Q. Any other things the PR people don't mention? Finished products can easily take an hour to print, and they look carved, so if you're looking for glass-like gleam on your custom candy bowl, you'll be disappointed. But the resolution is fine enough to make gears with meshing teeth, which is an amazing new ability. The Replicator is an early product in an emerging area, so it's logical that a newer cheaper model will be available soon. It's also fair to imagine that if the Replicator is a commercial success, that large, well-funded competitors with names like HP or Brother can't be far behind.

Details: Makerbot, . Price: \$1750 (\$2000 for the 2 color version). Ages: 10-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, math, science. Entry date: 1/16/2012.