Children's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

Not too big, not too small.
Just right.

Children's Technology Review

November 2012

Vol. 20, No 11, Issue 152

"Denotes an "Editor's Choice."

For Kids, the iPad Mini is "Just Right."

If Apple's (www.apple.com) latest line-up of mobile devices were the three bears, the story might read: "Once upon a time, there were three Apples – a little, small, wee iPod Touch for $300, a middle-sized iPad mini for $330, and a great, huge iPad which comes in two varieties -- the iPad 2 for $400, and the iPad 3 for $500. Which is "just right" for most children?

Apple's next generation iPod Touch 5 and the iPad Mini might look smaller, but they have huge implications for children.

I think it will be the iPad Mini. Children's smaller hands are a better match with a smaller, lighter device, especially when it comes to holding and tilting, required with many apps. And, perhaps smaller things feel less threatening and "more snuggly," a concept well exploited by the Nintendo DS. Before this month however, smaller screens have meant fewer apps and harder to read print. The small-sized screens are also harder to huddle around for apps like Toca Tea Party.

Enter the iPad Mini -- the compromise between smaller size and app access. For the first time, children can have all the iPad apps in a smaller form, not to mention the clear display -- faster Wi-Fi, improved sound and better cameras (than the iPad 2). Even the new, smaller-size "Lightning" plug is more child appropriate. The new Mini can talk and listen, via Siri -- and we've noticed that kids love to play with Siri, as much as they do a Furby. The iPad Mini has the best power per size ratio, with a moderate price ($330 and up). Not too big, not too small – we say just right. It's also worth noting that the iPad Mini is the same size as the two leading toy industry tablet offerings – the LeapPad 2 (www.leapfrog.com) and Innotab2 (www.vtechkids.com). Educators who are about to invest vast amounts in the large-sized iPads might want to hit the pause button, and parents -- consider yourself warned. Apple's iPad Mini will most likely be the hot toy this holiday season.

The Past, Present & Future of Webkinz

Webkinz -- the plush toy with an online alter ego has enjoyed an amazing ride, but it has also been surrounded by an air of secrecy. Until now. Don't miss Scott Traylor's interview with Karl Borst, the Creative Director for Webinz. Karl talks about the early days (2005), kid testing and his work on a new Unity based 3D virtual world from Ganz called Amazing Worlds. See page 6.

LittleClickers: Hurricanes

  THEY huff and they puff.... and they can blow a lot of trees down. We know. We had a tropical storm pass over our house. As hurricanes go, ours wasn't very strong enough to even rank on the scale http://youtu.be/GUXYxZomqIs. But strong hurricanes can tear buildings to pieces http://youtu.be/unV5KcSrY-I. Our storm knocked out our power, delayed our issue and made us postpone Dust or Magic. We've decided to learn a bit more about these powerful storms, on page 3.

Showcasing Powerful Technologies in ECE Settings

  Finally I'm just back from NAEYC where I participated in panel by the "Bs" (Bailey, Bales, Blagojevic and Buckleitner). The 90 minute talk is full of a lot of concrete examples of using technology in early childhood classrooms. See online http://youtu.be/IWlESMVEIaw.

HURRICANES

THEY huff and they puff.... and can blow your house down. We know. We had one pass over our house. As hurricanes go, ours wasn't very strong http://youtu.be/GUXYxZomqIs. But some can tear buildings apart http://youtu.be/unV5KcSrY-I. Ours knocked out our power, and delayed our issue. Want to learn more about hurricanes? Here are some links.

1. First, are there any hurricanes going on, right now?
Visit http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/ where you can see a real-time map created by the National Hurricane Center.

2. How do hurricanes get their names?
At http://www.wmo.int/pages/prog/www/tcp/Storm-naming.html you learn that the names are assigned six years in advance by a group of scientists from all over the world. Male and female names are used, and no hurricane is named after a real person. The names make the storms easier to remember and track. In 2013, storm names will include Andrea, Barry, Jerry, Karen, Nestor and Wendy.

3. I live in Chicago. Do I need to worry about hurricanes?
No. At weather.com http://wxch.nl/XmXqnP you learn that Hurricanes need warm water to work. Once they come over land, they run out of steam. The weather.com map on the right shows that if you live away from the east coasts of either Asia or the USA you don't have much to worry about.
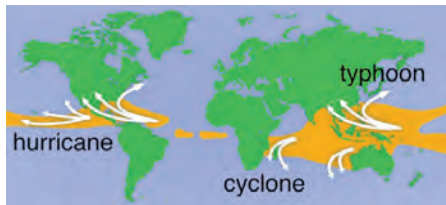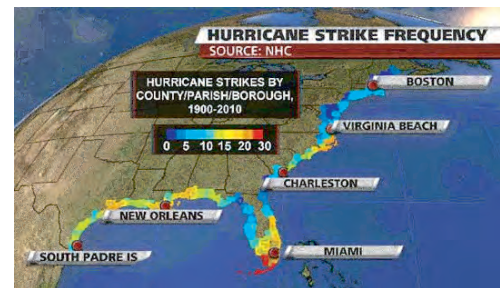
4. What's the difference between a hurricane, typhoon, cyclone or a tropical depression? All are large storms that form over warm ocean waters. In Asia, they use the word typhoon or cyclone. In the USA, we call strong storms hurricanes. Weaker storms are called tropical storms.

5. Who was Saffir-Simpson, and why should I care?
Saffir was an engineer, Simpson a meteorologist. Together they created a scale, from 1 (75 MPH winds) to 5 (160 MPH and up) based on the damage winds cause to buildings. At NPR http://n.pr/qPce0 you can see the scale in action.

6. Which has stronger winds, a Hurricane or a Tornado?
At http://www.diffen.com/difference/Hurricane_vs_Tornado you can learn that a tornado can have much stronger winds, but a hurricane is more damaging, due to associated storm surges, floods and damage to structures.

APPLICATION:
1. Make a plan for a storm. Visit http://www.ready.gov/kids where you can learn how to get your house ready for a big storm. You can also play games, like the word search on the right.
2. Explore the forces in a hurricane. At http://bit.ly/1EipqO you learn how to turn two plastic bottles into a micro hurricane (or tornado), caused by the Coriolis effect, a force caused by the rotation of the earth.

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L E A F B E H S C Y L C D Q O
C A R D A O C U Q F T I P I Q
T S E J Q M G P I R N K D N F
U F N P X F I P Q P L A H K J
A B O W Z J W L E N R D Z U B
M G H R W W G Y Y J E A B A C
A V P O G A U K B P O T C N W
F K L A H W H I H N L K S J L
Y I P U Z E M T K U P A E I N
M E E T I N G P L A C E N N L
B M J Y D O S L C Y T E F A S
G U J C A L M K M L O L K J C
E N O D L S W K E H F N L T L
H C H P V Q E J M I Q S L J S
A F Q S Z Q K N L V M O T X N
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Words To Find:
- [ ] BACKPACK
- [ ] CALM
- [ ] FAMILY PLAN
- [ ] LISTEN
- [ ] MEETING PLACE
- [ ] PHONE
- [ ] RADIO
- [ ] SAFETY
- [ ] SUPPLY KIT

LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Hurricanes

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcBVHzUUEKwl6hrFOJlxgDmeitnvDlfh9

Interact with this page online, at http://www.LittleClickers.com
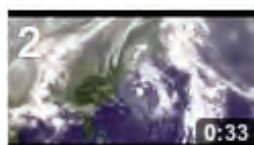
Technology Enhanced Play in Amsterdam

Six examples from Cinekid's Medialab

BY WARREN BUCKLEITNER

There's nothing like several hundred happy kids to pick up your day. That's what I discovered inside an old brick warehouse located in the restored gasworks district (www.westergasfabriek.nl) in Amsterdam, Netherlands last month, in an exhibition called Medialab (no connection to MIT). I was there as a speaker (disclosure: travel expenses were covered) for an annual media festival called Cinekid (www.cinekid.nl). The Medialab was just one part of the festival. I've seen these types of exhibits before, and I wasn't expecting to be impressed. In fact, I didn't even pack my video camera.

What I discovered was a refreshing delight. It wasn't the technology that sparkled, as much as its effect on the hundreds of children, from ages 3-12 who roamed among the 37 stations. The Medialab organizers went out of their way to bring in exhibits with high potential, made by people with sometimes low budgets. These included a troop of new media artists from Finland, a robot designer from Japan and several doctoral students, including Eric Rosenbaum from MIT who was showing off Makey Makey, his DIY (Do It Yourself) system.

Fortunately, I had my iPad, so I started the video camera and did my best to capture some examples of innovation. These resulting six videos are the basis of this article. Start with Cinekid Medialab 2012 Overview, at http://youtu.be/dkUFaEVLrZg with a short guided tour by Paulien Dresscher, Head New Media and Festival Programmer: Medialab.

What is "Embodied Cognition?"

Cognition is embodied when it is deeply dependent upon features of the physical body of an agent, that is, when aspects of the agent's body beyond the brain play a significant causal or physically constitutive role in cognitive processing.
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/embodied-cognition/

EXAMPLE 1: TURN YOUR CHILD INTO A CO-OP GAME CONTROLLER

At http://youtu.be/vDqiquvsiZU you can see Dive! which essentially turns a child into a game controller. Here's how it works. A child lays, belly down, on a table-sized slab of wood that has accellerometers (motion sensors) mounted on it (most likely inside a Wii Remote). A flying simulation is started on a large screen that is directly in front of the platform. A rear-mounted projector is used, so you can sit just a few feet from the landscape. A flight simulation is then started in which you earn points by flying through circles. The entire contraption requires at least two people — one to lay on the controller and shift weight, the others to move the table in the air. The more in sync the people are, the higher the score.

EXAMPLE 2: AUGMENTED REALITY WITH FRIENDS, SUPER-SIZED

Toverblokken, at http://youtu.be/dkUFaEVLrZg?t=3m28s uses a large round carrousel about 10 feet from side to side, mounted below a camera. On the carrousel are nine puzzle cubes, which can be turned to make different large designs. The camera is connected to a computer with augmented reality sensing abilities. The entire contraption is on an elevated stage, with the video image displayed on a nearby screen. This creates an interesting effect for the children -- when they climb onto the stage, they can see a top down view of themselves as they play with the puzzle parts. With most AI or Kinect experiences, you face the camera. Anyone who has worked with QR codes or other augmented reality situation knows that a trigger image is required to start an animated effect. In this case the images are co-constructed by a group of children who work together to make an image. When the mosaic comes together, the image triggers an animated effect. If you make the giant disosaur nest, a swarm of flying dinosaurs invades the stage, which can be scared away with giant foam hands.

VIDEO 3: I'M A DANCING GIANT!

In Giants of the Hood http://youtu.be/mFhoLdFPSSs children create, and then control a 20 foot tall giant, projected on the wall. The giant's movements are mapped onto theirs, as long as they stand on a special stage that is mounted in front of a Kinect sensor. Children start at a table full of blank cardboard templates and markers, to make their giant. The giant is then scanned and projected onto a wall of the building with a bright (10,000 luman) projector. This alone would be fun. But that's just the beginning. Children can control the movements of their giant. It's like marionette puppets made out of light, and the Kinect is used to replace the strings. As you watch the video notice how the activity successfully celebrates a child's ideas by filling the room with their ideas. Also note the aesthetics of projecting the image on a an older brick wall, making the entire hall feel child-friendly.

VIDEO 4: TURN A KID INTO A MOVIESTAR

Sprong in 'diepe http://youtu.be/InjWiOzZ7Cg expands on a common cinematogrphy trick of shooting a subject against a green screen, and dubbing in music and special effects. But it also leverages the power of social media. In this case, children star in a mini-episode of an Indiana Jones-style adventure complete with music. The set contains all the props, including a rope ladder, a vine and a golden apple. The finished video is posted online. See http://www.cinekid.nl/festival/madeatcinekid/2012/sprong/22

VIDEO 5: A NEW TWIST ON STOPMOTION PHOTOGRAPHY

Stoptrain http://youtu.be/nCwVIx8aFm is another exhibit that uses existing technologies: an electric train, a digital camera, a computer with stop motion software and thousands of colorful corn-foam nuggets called PlayMais. The nuggets stick together when they are moistened, letting children build all sorts of things. The train moves through the play area at a very slow pace -- and snaps a still photo every 20 seconds. The resulting stop motion video gives you a trains-eye view of a colorful fantasy world.

VIDEO 6: A 21ST CENTURY SANDOX

Mimicry http://youtu.be/rRWm-m_X5s0 is another exhibit that uses hacked Microsoft Kinect sensors. This time, the sensor is directly mounted above a sandbox, and it is used to sense the elevation of the sand. Why do such a thing? To turn the sandbox into a game level editor. At a nearby video station four players are moving marbles through the mountains and roads in the sand. Their view of the sandbox is from the viewpoint of the marble, so you can imagine, the landscape looks rather exotic. This is an exhibit where the concept is stronger than the implementation, at least from a gamer point of view... the marbles are hard to see. But the feeling of the sand between your fingers, combined with the fun of a role-playing game made this one of the most conceptually exciting exhibits in the Medialab. According to John Newbigin, the chair of a group called Creative England, "What I love about this sandbox is that the kids are playing absolutely in the real world, with real objects but the play is extended and enriched by the fact that there's a virtual application to it as well. So it's not just simulating reality. It is reality, but there's another whole dimension thats added to it. Over the next five years, the potential for this is incredibly exciting, because there's nothing manufactured about it. It's a sandpit, and we all know what a sandpit is. But this is a 21st century sandpit. This generation of kids will have a different understanding of the way the technologies which we develop relate to the real world. This potential is incredibly exciting. Rousseau wrote how somebody learning skills as an Artisan in a workshop and they think they're becoming an Artisan, but they're actually becoming a philospher because they're doing things with their hands. And this thing -- doing thing with your hands is absolutely integrated with what you're doing with your head and what you're doing with your heart, that what seems to me incredibly exciting."

Giants of the Hoods
Finland

Stoptrain
Stop Animation -- that you can eat

John Newbigin
Chair, Creative England

Inside the World of Webkinz

An Interview With Creative Director Karl Borst

by SCOTT TRAYLOR

Karl Borst is the Creative Director at Ganz for Webkinz; a position that has given him the front row on the turbulant world of children's virtual worlds. Last week, Karl shared some insights about the past, present and future of Webkinz, including the latest 3D virtual world from Ganz called Amazing Worlds. Here are some selections of our conversation.

Scott Traylor: How long have you been working on Webkinz? Where did the idea come from?

Karl Borst: Development started in late 2003, and I joined on March 1, 2004. The original idea came from Howard Ganz himself. He loved the toys and wanted a new way to market them. Taking inspiration from Cabbage Patch Kids, he wanted to create an experience where the child "discovered" their new pet. Later we expanded this to the idea that your plush "came to life" inside the virtual world. It was very important to us that the player feel the connection between their toy and the pet online. This was where I was able to really expand the original idea. It was critical to me that the pet feel a part of the experience regardless of where you were in the world. Adding the pet's image to the dock, along with the multiple emotional states and speech balloons may seem very obvious right now, but back in 2004 none of the pet sites had this. This was a big improvement in Webkinz.

ST: How long did it take to get the vision of Webkinz off the ground?

KB: Well it depends on where we finally got "off the ground." In August of 2004, after a day of play testing with kids, we realized we were going in the wrong direction. Honestly, we threw out a big chunk of work that we'd done up to that date. This was a very difficult decision to make. The toys were paid for, sitting in the warehouse, and plans were well under way to release the toy that October. Going back to the drawing board meant that we'd miss the Holidays. That said, in our hearts we knew that it needed to be done, so we buckled down and got to it. We ended up launching in April 2005, and it was a tough first few months. Retailers didn't understand the product. They didn't get how the world and the toy related. We even made a video that explained the product and gave the retailers televisions to show it on. All the while we were adding features and content to the site. The amount of work we did in 2005 is mind blowing. Realize we weren't even in the top 100,000 sites at the end of 2005. Yet in 2006 we started to see real momentum. Christmas had given us a lift and then Easter, and the players were coming in at a faster and faster rate. Then in 2007 we exploded, and by the end of that year we were a top 100 site, and the number four Google searched term. If there was anything that I could tell companies that are considering building a virtual world, it would be you need to have patience. None of the virtual worlds have exploded out of the gate – not Webkinz, not Neopets, not Wizard 101, not even Club Penguin. You need to commit to the project and invest in making it better until you've got the perfect world for your audience.

ST: What do you look for when testing with children?

KB: We try to focus on what the child is doing, not what they are saying. You can really learn a lot from the actions a child is taking, or more

> *It was very important to us that the player feel the connection between their toy and the pet online. Karl Borst, Webkinz*

The screen below was from an issue of CTR back in 2006 (we think). Notice the word "adoption."

often not taking. When you ask questions you find that kids have a hard time describing what they did or why they did it, and many times they really want to please you and aren't as harsh as you really need them to be. When you see them fail at an action, or skip over a feature you thought was key, it speaks volumes.

ST: How did you shape the online experience over time? What guided your thinking?

KB: I'm sure this is where I'm supposed to say that we closely analyzed user trends and data, but to be honest we didn't. A lot of the time we went with our guts and with what we were hearing from the players. First we knew that we wanted to make the world as interactive as possible. We wanted every object that looked like it was functional to actually be functional. I honestly think this direction has made the Webkinz room engine the best on the market. We also knew we just needed "more". More games, more items, more stuff to do. Kids love telling you what they want, so you end up with more information that you could ever really use. The real challenge is taking all of that information and finding the gems to follow through with. Then turning those ideas into features that kids actually want to play. We weren't 100% successful in this, but we had some real hits, like the Employment Office and the Chef Challenge.

ST: How has Webkinz changed over time?

KB: Adding more and more makes things complicated. Webkinz is much, much larger now than when we started. Tons of sections, thousands of items, dozens of games, multi-player areas… When we started it was so simple. Players could jump in and figure it out. Now we need to help players through the initial few plays so that they don't get overwhelmed by the options. There comes a point where adding new features doesn't improve your game. Now we're focusing on refining our features, and using those features to create engaging events on a regular basis.

ST: Do you see differences in how kids from different countries use Webkinz?

KB: Actually, we don't. I think that we're tapping into some universal ideas of play and imagination. The core activities for all of our players are play games in the Arcade, do their daily activities and then play with their pets in their virtual rooms. While we've added dozens of features since the launch of the game, these core features which we've had since day one still resonate the best.

ST: Ganz has a number of virtual worlds now, can you share a little about each?

KB: We have four. First of course is Webkinz, which has been running strong for seven and half years now. Next is Webkinz Jr. It was designed as a truly pre-school virtual world. It's highly educational, and requires no reading. While it did not see the success that Webkinz did, parents of children who play absolutely love the site. This year we released two more virtual worlds. In Amazing World you play a "Zing," helping out the characters you meet, shooing away the nasty Nix, and working together to make the world more amazing. Finally, we're currently in Beta with another new virtual world called Nakamas. This world has been specifically designed for girls ages 5-11 who love making friendship bracelets and hanging with friends.

ST: How long has Amazing World been in development?

KB: While I can't say exactly how long we've been working on it, the development time was similar to Webkinz. Again we went through a number of iterations. Sometimes building a game takes on a life of its own. Many of the features that are now in the game, like the Nix, were added very late in development. And we're still improving the game. We haven't been happy about the interiors of the homes for some time now, so we're working on making them much cooler – really taking them in a new direction.

ST: What did you do differently in building Amazing World from that of Webkinz? Are there any similarities?

KB: From the very start of the development of Amazing World, I wanted to build a virtual world that complimented Webkinz. I wanted players to have a very different experience

Minty Moose, circa 2008

One of the zings named Ruckus from Amazing World

In 2007 we exploded, and by the end of that year we were a top 100 site, and the number 4 Google searched term.

Inside Webkinz, continued

in AW than in Webkinz. This is why you don't "take care" of your Zing, and it isn't a "pet". The player should be able to play Webkinz for half an hour, then jump over to Amazing World and never feel that they're duplicating effort. The other obvious difference was that the game was working with Unity3D to create a world that you can really live in. This meant that we wanted our games and activities to feel part of that world, and not independent sections. The fact that there is no "arcade" was a conscious decision. It also allowed us to do much more with the Zing's room. Now the home and the yard provide greater freedom of design, without the restriction a "grid." This freedom comes at the cost of some more complexity but I think we've done a good job of balancing this out.

ST: What are you hoping for with Amazing World?
KB: Naturally we're hoping that Amazing World captures the imaginations of kids, like Webkinz. While we've all seen many toy-connected virtual worlds come and go, Amazing World has the potential to revitalize this space, and most importantly, Ganz is committed to making this world great. Most people don't remember that when Webkinz was launched that it was quite small, but was teeming with potential. With a dedicated team, we were able to refine, expand and improve the game into what it is today. We have a team that is just as dedicated to Amazing World and I am confident that players who get into Amazing World will stay on board for a very wild and exciting ride.

ST: How challenging is it to manage the needs of a toy product with that of a related virtual world?
KB: Ganz started out as a toy company, so when it comes to creating the products themselves, we've got a great system. The challenge comes with creating unique, engaging online play for specific products under a single brand. If you look at any popular toy line, take Polly Pocket as an example, you've got small $5 figure packs and large houses for $50 with multiple figures, and special packs with animals, etc. When those are the toys by themselves, the value is right before your eyes and you either like what you're about to open or not. When you have a connected virtual world, you have to make a decision. What does each item give you? What should a $50 toy get compared to a $5 toy? Despite the fact that the customer can see the value of the $50 toy, there is still an assumption that the online play value will be greater than a $5 toy. Do I think that we nailed it with Webkinz every time? No. We had some real knock out successes with our ancillary products and some real flubs. It was bound to happen as we felt out this uncharted territory. That said, what we did perfectly well was the initial toy purchase itself. The value that we give with a single Webkinz plush toy is exceptional, and has clearly driven our thinking for our new sites.

ST: What do you think of the virtual world space today? How about the toy industry? Any thoughts on where you see either industry going?
KB: Overall I feel that virtual worlds have an inherent challenge to their definition. Virtual Worlds aren't MMOs in the classic sense, though they have many of the social, multi-player experiences that make MMOs great. They also aren't game depots, like Miniclip, but are expected to have many, quick-play games to engage players while they work up the virtual currency to expand their homes and dress their avatars. Finally, they aren't "games" per se. They need to be a sandbox of interactive systems that allow the players to choose the experience that they wish to make, while remaining a cohesive world that isn't confusing to a new player. It is important to integrate casual games into the world experience itself, making social interaction and cooperation a core part of the player's day-to-day activities and bringing the player more fully into the world through story and guided play. The future of virtual worlds -- including Amazing World -- is in bringing these components closer together.

Scott Traylor (scott@360KID.com) is President of 360KID and is a frequent contributor to CTR. He has no formal business relationships with Webkinz.

The new look of Amazing World, online at http://www.amazingworld.com/

Feature Reviews

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.

ABC House

Seventh in the series of the ABC apps from Peapod Labs (see also Music, Food, Baby Zoo Animals, Wildlife, Play and Go), ABC House turns your iPad or iPhone screen into an alphabet-themed visual encyclopedia. Instead of using stock art, however, these apps pull photos from royalty free sources, such as Flickr and YouTube. The result is an authentic presentation of letter-themed items of things found around the home.

You start by pressing one of the 231 thumbnail images, organized alphabetically. Each leads to a letter-themed home item. For C, for example you get a closeup view of a computer or a camera; E is for envelope or eraser. Like the other titles in the series, each featured item is spelled on the bottom of the screen. Touching any of the letters within the word lets you quickly jump to a new set of words, offering a nice secondary navigation technique.

But wait, there's more. About a third of the photos include either YouTube videos or rub-away images, where rubbing the picture of the fireplace reveals the flames. Note that you'll need an active Internet connection to keep the app updated.

Details: Peapod labs, www.peapodlabs.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: language, reading, letter recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 8/8/2012. [WB]

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

92%

Animal SnApp: Farm

Old MacDonald gets a British twist (boots are called "a Welly", for example), right from Nosy Crow (see also Cinderella) in this make-your-own nursery rhyme. The app is a good choice for the young child.

You start by combining animals whose parts are all mixed up. When the sliding sections match, you have the option of starting a well crafted short story, in which you help the animal solve a problem. Cuddly Cow, for example can't get any sleep, and Diggity Dog has lost his bone. To solve the problem, you visit with the other animals, and there's always a happy ending. Older children well be less than thrilled after a few minutes with this slower paced app; but everyone will like the personable animals. This is an excellent language experience.

Details: Nosy Crow, www.nosycrow.com. Price: $3.99. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: early reading, language, animals, first app. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 10/24/2012. [WB]

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

92%

Bubble Guppies

Based on Nickelodeon's preschool school series, this collection of tame, rather chatty games lets you join the class with the Bubble Guppies: namely Molly, Gil, Deema, Nonny, OOna and Goby.

Children can explore the farm and city, play hide-and-seek with the Bubble Puppy, answer questions with Mr. Grouper, and celebrate with the silly Little Fish. Topics covered include colors, shapes, and numbers. Developed by Black Lantern Studios for 2K Play. See also Nickelodeon Team Umizoomi & Dorra's Fanstastic Flight for Nintendo DS.

Details: 2K Play, www.2kgames.com/2kplay/. Price: $30. Ages: 2-5. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: classification. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 6/20/2012. [WB]

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

Build and Play 3D - Plane, Train, Robot and More

Last week, we reviewed Sort and Stack Toys 3D; this week we were thrilled to discover another 3D puzzle from the same publisher. This time children snap together nine machines and vehicles by dragging and dropping the various pieces into place. Incorrect answers just fall back to the side; correct positions fall into place with a satisfying snap.

If the looping background music gets annoying, and it can after a few minutes, you can show children how to toggle it off (or back on, if they like).

Content includes an airplane, car, cement mixer, crane, digger, motorcycle, ship and train. Upon completion each machine starts to work. This is an excellent choice for any early childhood classroom.

Details: Pronetis Kids, www.pronetis.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: logic, classification, shapes. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 10/9/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	90%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	9	

Disney Creativity Studio

In the beginning, drawing was a simple process -- find some paper, pick up crayon or a pencil and get started. Unfortunately the Disney Creativity Studio, which consists of both an app and a $50 stylus, forgets how important simplicity is in the drawing and erasing process. Note that the app is free with the purchase of the stylus (a download code is included in the package). The app alone costs $3.99.

The stylus is the size of a fat marker and it houses a AA battery. If you hold down a toggle switch for a few seconds, an LED turns on with a chirp, signaling that the stylus is on. A drawing mode-changing button is hidden under the black rubber eraser; a secret that is well hidden until you read the instructions. After we determined that the batteries were fresh and that we were indeed looking at a production model, we tried the app/stylus with a variety of children. Nobody could figure out how to make it work. This is too bad, because the app contains a set of drawing lessons by a Disney artist, on how to draw (you guessed it) Disney characters. Does the world really need more kids who know how to draw Mickey Mouse? One noteworthy feature -- the eraser is smart -- the faster and longer you erase, the fatter the eraser area becomes. Content includes 30 colors and 45 coloring screens that also include tracing and connecting the dots. Created by eKids/Kid Designs for Disney. The best part about this package is the well-designed zipper carrying case for the stylus. If only the app were designed as well.

Details: Disney, . Price: $50. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 1.5 stars. Entry date: 10/5/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	1	30%
Educational	4	
Entertaining	5	
Design Features	3	
Good Value	2	

Don't Open Before Christmas

Similar to Doyle & Cummings' first ebook, Nash Smasher! this second app once again features a small boy headed for trouble. This time, 8-year-old Seymour can't resist peeking at his Christmas gift. As the story goes, there is a reason we wrap presents and tie them up with bows -- they aren't ready to hatch. When Seymour unwraps a few, things go very wrong. Thanks to the abundant pull tabs and turntable controls found on each page, you get to help Seymour unwrap, and then re-wrap his presents. The message -- good things can take time and patience; rushing can spoil the surprise. Each animated routine is extremely high in child control, which makes an experience children will come back to time and time again. Other features including a playable xylophone on one page, and a read-to-me option. Written by Bill Doyle, and illustrated by Troy Cummings.

Details: Crab Hill Press, www.crabhillpress.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: language, causality. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 10/4/2012. [WB]

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

95%

FIFA Soccer 13

Our testers, all real soccer players, liked this year's FIFA Soccer and have been playing the Xbox version nearly non-stop since it arrived. New features for 2013 include better artificial intelligence, dribbling, ball control and physical play, as well as better online features and live services. The new Attacking Intelligence lets you analyze the space and break down the defense by thinking two plays ahead. Complete Dribbling lets you face their opponent and use precise dribble touches for more accurate one on one gameplay. 1st Touch Control creates more opportunities for defenders to win back possession. The second generation of the Player Impact Engine expands physical play from just collisions to off-the-ball battles between players. Defenders can push and pull for position, and utilize their size and strength to force opponents into poor touches and decisions before the ball arrives. FIFA Soccer 13 Tactical Free Kicks provides the tools to create free kicks. You can now position up to three players over the ball and utilize dummy runs and more passing options to outwit your opponent. Content includes 500 officially licensed clubs and more than 15,000 players. The bottom line? This is an excellent soccer simulation and another solid addition to the EA Sports library.

Details: EA Sports - Electronic Arts Canada, www.eagames.com. Price: $60. Ages: 8-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: sports, soccer. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 6/19/2012. [WB]

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

92%

Finding Nemo: Escape to the Big Blue

Inspired by the original Disney-Pixar animated film, this Frogger-like game challenges you to steer a fish in a bag across different obstacles, in order to join Nemo. There are three modes: In Baggy Mode, you pick one of the Tank Gang characters that have escaped from the dentist's aquarium and use the touch screen to help roll them out to sea. Once completed, that player becomes playable in the mini-games. The Mini-game Mode lets you play as one of the film's characters including Nemo, Marlin, and Dory, and earn sea tokens for each of the games you complete. In Interactive Reef Mode, you can redeem the sea tokens you've earned to purchase items and personalize your own reef or aquarium. The 3DS version contains Finding Nemo 3D film clips. Prices are $30 for the Nintendo 3DS and $20 for the Nintendo DS version.

Testers: "this is a moderately fun game -- perhaps OK for a rainy weekend. It's not very spectacular."

Details: Disney Interactive Studios, www.disneyinteractivestudios.com. Price: $30. Ages: 6-12. Platform: Nintendo DS, Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 9/28/2012. [WB]

|	
Ease of Use	8
Educational	N
Entertaining	7
Design Features	9
Good Value	9

83%
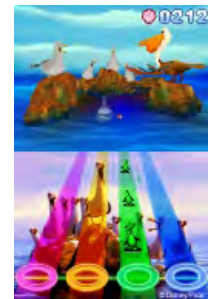
iSpotPro Themed Edition

Two pictures are shown, side-by-side. Can you spot the subtle differences? This tried-and-true format is applied repeatedly in this app, with 75 leveled puzzles based on five themes. The only problem is that the pictures are so small -- this puzzle is in need of a zoom. The graphics are OK, but not the best quality. Hints are available if you need them. There are also three game modes - play against time in easy or hard mode, or play at your own pace. You can save your progress, allowing you to start from where you leave off, and can reset all levels. There are no in app purchases.

Details: iSpotPro, www.ispotpro-themededition.com. Price: $0.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: visual discrimination, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 10/18/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	76%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	8	
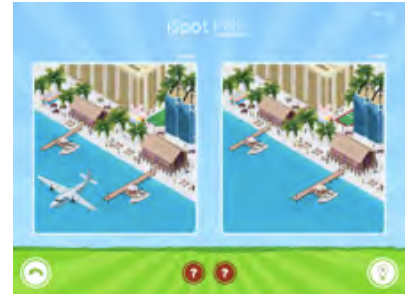
Let's Count

Designed to teach children to count, this app contains four counting exercises each dealing with jellybeans. You can arrange towers from short to tall; place the right count to the different colored blocks; place jellybeans into the right slot; and match the numbers. The menu requires reading, which is above the skill levels of the activities. This app is free and puts banner ads right at the bottom of the screen. The music is overbearing and can't be turned off.

Details: lifegearmobile, www.lifegearmobile.com. Price: $free. Ages: 1-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: counting, ordering, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.7 stars. Entry date: 10/5/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	74%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	7	

LittleBigPlanet Karting

Sackboy, or Sackgirl, returns in "the fastest LittleBigPlanet" adventure yet" with an E for Everyone rating. After Sackboy defeated the Negativitron, visitors called the Hoard have arrived from far away on speedy go-karts to seek out and steal Craftworld's most precious prizes. The adventure begins as Sackboy, armed with his own go-kart, uses his fast-paced karting to save the Craftworld universe. Players can get behind the steering wheel and race through tracks, discover unlockables in 3D environments, and battle in karting arenas with pick up items and weaponry. Players can also create their own racing experience using the in-game editor to customize tracks, karts, weapons, and Sackboy costumes, then download designs built by other players from around the world. Features include: 25 new story levels to play across seven planets; four-player offline/eight-player online multiplayer; new gadgets and tools; PlayStation Move Support using the the PlayStation Move Racing Wheel featuring folding motorcycle handlebars with twist grip throttle; and more than 40 trophies to earn on the road to platinum. Developed by United Front Games in conjunction with Sony Computer Entertainment Worldwide San Diego Studios and Media Molecule.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc., www.us.playstation.com. Price: $60. Ages: 5-up. Platform: PlayStation 3. Teaches/Purpose: racing, creativity, social media, co-op play. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 9/14/2012. [WB]

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

Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now!

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

Featuring some of the best classic Dr. Seuss illustrations and a story that is perfect for early beginning readers, Marvin K. Mooney Will You Please Go Now! ($2.99 for Apple and Android) features a clean, uncluttered design, plus excellent text scaffolding that is typical of most Oceanhouse Media apps -- touch any picture to see the word fly out of the text to help you make the word/object association. In addition, you can touch any word in the text to hear it read aloud. In the story, Young Marvin K. Mooney has overstayed his welcome and the narrator has no shortage of ideas how Marvin could go. "You can go on stilts. You can go by fish. You can go in a Crunk-Car if you wish." Missing are the record-your-own voice features. Notice that our first download of this app kept crashing on the iPad Mini.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 4-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 10/17/2012. [WB]

Micro Chargers Time Track

|		
Ease of Use	9	**90%**
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	

These tiny battery powered cars make even Hot Wheels seem giant. About the size of a penny, the Micro Racers get their power from two AA batteries stored in the starting blocks. There is no on/off switch. Each car has a permanently installed solid capacitor that should not come in contact with water, and should obviously not be chewed by a puppy or baby brother. The cars charge quickly, making the beetle-sized cars zoom around the track with amazing two minute bursts of speed.

The snap together track parts aren't the best, but they work. The kit includes one track with four built-in chargers, two trading cards and two quick charge cars. Requires two AA batteries (not included). Available exclusively at Toys"R"Us.

Details: Moose Enterprises, www.mooseworld.com.au. Price: $35. Ages: 6-up. Platform: smart toy. Teaches/Purpose: car racing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 7/25/2012. [WB]

Miny Moe Car

Ease of Use	10	**80%**
Educational	6	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	8	
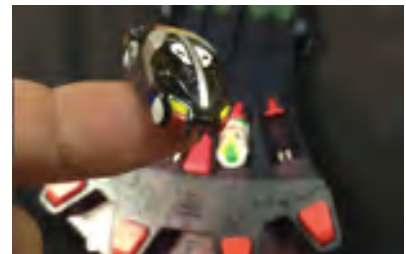
Miny Moe Car is a simple driving simulator that lets the kids drive a car. Children can steer, accelerate and brake, and use real dashboard functions like tuning the radio and using the windshield wipers, all with realistic sounds. Children can also wash the car and perform simple maintenance tasks including mending a punctured tire, changing a light bulb and filling the car with gas. The app also features a racetrack to drive around. There are no in-app purchases and no third-party advertising.

Details: Blinq/Appanero AB, http://www.blinq.se/. Price: $1.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: cause and effect, cars, driving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 6/6/2012. [WB]

Montessori Geometry

Designed to playfully introduce such concepts as "an obtuse angled isosceles triangle," Montessori Geometry can't be accused of talking down to young children. The app, designed for children from 5 to 10, lets younger children explore shapes, beyond the usual circle, triangle and square. For older children, there are 3D shapes. Content includes 23 different shapes in 2D and 3D, six "Shape-Finding Cities"-- scenes where you hunt and find shapes hidden in a world, a "magic paintbrush" option to reveal the hidden shapes and a 2-player game to cooperate and not compete.

Progress is tracked -- as you find shapes you can earn medals which are stored on a "medals board."

Created in France, the app is available in eight languages: English, Spanish, French, German, Dutch, Italian, Japanese and Chinese. Runs on iPhone 3GS, iPhone 4, iPhone 4S, 3/4G iPod touch and iPad; requires iOS 5.1 or better. The file is 40.5 MB. See the demo video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ym0JwMuk7I0

Details: Les Trois Elles Interactive, http://lestroiselles.com/en. Price: $4.99. Ages: 5 -10. Platform: iPhone, iPad*. Teaches/Purpose: geometry, shapes. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 9/11/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	84%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	9	
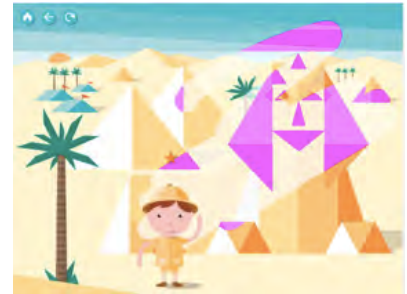
PetWorld3D: My Animal Rescue

Originally designed for PC, this is the first in a series of 3D animal simulation and animal apps. The app lets you take care of the different animals in the Sunflower Pet Shelter by performing various tasks.

You job is to find new owners for the fosterlings, and only animals that have been well taken care of will be able to find a new home. Tasks include feeding, cleaning cages, getting water from the well, brushing, and playing with the animals. Animals include cats, dogs, guinea pigs, hamsters and rabbits. Our testers found this app hard to figure out.

Details: Tivola Publishing GmbH, www.tivola.de. Price: $3.99. Ages: 4-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: taking care of animals. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.2 stars. Entry date: 10/18/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	4	64%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	6	

Play Hospital Pediatrics

Designed to make visits to the doctor's office easier for a child to understand, this doll-house-like experience contains five rooms, including a waiting room, the medicine dispensary, a play room and so on. You can put different members of the family on the scale, for example, to see how much they weight, or tap on a large fish tank to make the fish move. The app lacks realism and accuracy and there are some missed opportunities for structured play on the screens. In short, this is well-intentioned, but hastily designed. Some of the routines could make more sense; and a lot of objects don't do anything.

Details: BlueCloud Inc., www.bluecloud.co.kr . Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: helping children get ready for the pediatrician's office. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 10/25/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	10	78%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	8	

Pyramids 3D—Wonders of the Old Kingdom

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

88%

Can't afford a personal tour of the Egyption Pyramids. Here's a beautifully illustrated $14 option, fresh from Touch Press. You start with a helicopter view of the plateau where the pyramids, tombs and the Sphinx are located— at Giza near Cairo, Egypt. As you "fly" around the map, you can tap one of the three three main pyramids, the Sphinx and eight tombs, to fly inside with the company of an authoratative-sounding British guide (Bram Calcoen). To move through a tunnel, you spread two fingers (or pinch to move back) -- a movement mechanic that takes some getting used to. Most of the interesting paintings or items are explained by way of pop-up text boxes. Noteworthy features include the ability to toggle between "then" and "now" settings on 35 of the paintings, letting you see immediately the effects of thousands of years of aging. Features like this help remind you why you spend $500 on an iPad.

You can also touch an area of the painting for details on such things as pulling papyrus stalks, or force feeding geese. This curiosity-driven learning is compelling, leading you further into the stories behind the artifacts. Other features include 3D photography by Sandro Vannini, an interactive version of a book by Egyptologist Zahi Hawass, and 350 photographs and 40 objects that can be zoomed and spun to view from every angle. These include Tutankhamun's mask (the light changes as you move your iPad) and the Solar Boat, which an be looked at from very angle. Pyramids 3D—Wonders of the Old Kingdom is created by Touch Press, the people behind the best-selling iPad titles: The Elements, Solar System. This title is produced and published in partnership with Heritage World Press and Laboratorio Rossi.

Details: Touch Press, www.touchpress.com. Price: $13.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad (1.1 GB download). Teaches/Purpose: history, ancient Egypt, pyramids, mummies. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 10/17/2012. [WB]

Shadow Move

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

86%

We've all seen a shadow, but can you guess the shape behind the shadow? This clever collection of 50 spatial puzzles uses shadows as clues, and it really gives you a mental workout. The idea is to twist and tilt objects, shown in one part of the screen, to exactly match a model, shown in an insert box. The clear 3D graphics effectively illustrate that when it comes to transposing 3D to 2D, things don't always look the way they appear.

The first levels are free; additional levels may cost. We noticed that the mechanics of twisting and turning your model has a bit of a learning curve; and younger children may need assistance.

Details: Nexon USA, www.nexon.com. Price: $free. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 11/1/2012. [WB]
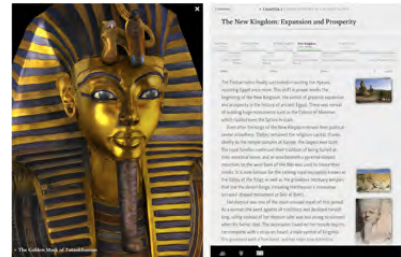
Skylanders Giants

Ease of Use	9	92%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	9	
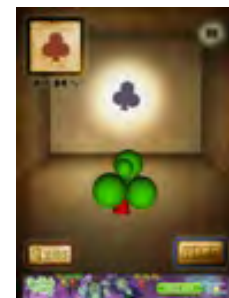
Big news for little kids. Sixteen new plastic Skylander figurines have been released for Fall 2012, and eight of them are Giant-sized, with "Giant" being about as big as a child's hand. In case you've not yet heard of Skylanders, here's how they work. The idea is to combine a set of collectable plastic figurines with a well-designed, easy to play video game adventure that has roots in the Spyro franchise.

The starter pack (called the "Portal Pack") costs $60 and includes one Skylander; the more expensive Starter Pack goes for $75 and includes four characters plus the portal. All of the Skylanders can work with the related Spyro video game and "Portal of Power" peripheral (a light-up stage that acts like an additional game controller). The Portal is required so that your players can interact with the game.

New Skylander features include the ability to light-up and an improved portal that plugs into the console, eliminating the step of syncing and finding batteries. The game comes with new challenges and better integration across console and mobile. Note that these are known as "Series 2" Skylanders that have "Wow Pow" upgrade power and the choice of more than one upgrade path. All Skylanders characters are compatible with the Skylanders Giants game, which also promises "all new arenas and additional gameplay options in Battle Mode for head-to-head play." Skylanders Giants is better integrated with the Skylanders Universe - the online world where players can share and fight one another. The game runs onWii, Xbox 360, PS3, 3DS, which includes the portal, the game (disk or cartridge), one Giant, one new Skylander, one Series 2 Skylander, three trading cards, and a poster. The $60 Portal Owners Pack (Wii, Xbox 360, PS3) includes the new game and one Giant. Sold alone, the plastic figurines cost between $12 and $15.

Details: Activision, Inc., www.activision.com. Price: $75. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Wii, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360. Teaches/Purpose: collecting, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 6/14/2012. [WB]

Snow White

Ease of Use	2	50%
Educational	3	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	5	

Good graphics and narration meets low quality design, in this digital retelling of the classic Disney story. Created in Spain, the large, 1.6 GB app features typical page by page, touch the hot spot design, with eight embedded games that follow tried and true play patterns.

The menu requires reading, and the print appears in a very small font, which is hard to read. Links to social media services are included on the main menu. The games include Butterfly Garden, Match and Pop, Memorize Me, Maze Escape, Puzzles, River Challenge, Sing Along and Trumpet Melodies.

Clearly there is a lot of talent behind this app; hopefully future titles will be better developed.

Details: G4M3 Studios, www.g4m3studios.com. Price: $free. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad (1.6 GB), Kindle. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.5 stars. Entry date: 7/2/2012. [WB]

Solar Walk - Saturn

Ready to be dazzled by some out of this world graphics? This is the free, teaser version of Solar Walk (CTR July 2010) which focuses only on Saturn's view of the solar system. The full version of the app ($.99) gives you all of the planets. You can easily pull or pinch your way around the solar system to see the solar system from the view of Saturn and its moons (Mimas, Enceladus, Tethys, and Dione), speed up or slow down time, and discover astrophysical relations with the flick of a finger.

The celestial objects in the app feature an Information Tab that brings up data about the object including size, mass, orbital velocity, history of missions, and structural layers of planets and their atmospheres. Each object also has a media library with images and a newly added section with interesting facts. In addition, the preset Bookmarks will show you Saturn and its rings from different angles as well as the view of Saturn from Enceladus, Titan, and more. Features include: 3D mode (3D glasses required); 3D Model of the Milky Way Galaxy; zoom and rotate Saturn and satellites; Time Machine; Big Screen - connect a second display to view Saturn on a big screen providing you have the cables and a projector. There's also an ad-like movie that highlights features of the app.

Details: Vito Technology, www.vitotechnology.com. Price: $free. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: solar system, Saturn. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 10/5/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	90%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	

Sort and Stack Toys 3D

Jigsaw puzzles apps -- where you drag and drop the pieces into place-- abound. But few are designed as well as Sort and Stack Toys 3D. Designed in Romania, the colorful app was inspired by existing stacking toys, where your job is to figure out how things fit together using color or shape clues.

There's plenty of room for trial and error -- the mistakes simply drop to the bottom of the screen, which makes experimenting fun.

Options let you toggle the background music on or off, as well as the sound effects. An easier hint mode can be toggled on from the main menu, which makes it possible for very young children to succeed with this app. The puzzles are fun because the pieces "snap" into place -- just like real parts, and you are rewarded with animation and sounds when they fit into place.

Content includes 12 puzzles, each in 3D and arranged from easy to harder. Chris Crowell said "I thought this might be below my (kindergarten) students level but they love playing with it, and I was able to see some gaps in their development with regards to sorting and classification." All in all, this is a must download app for any ECE setting.
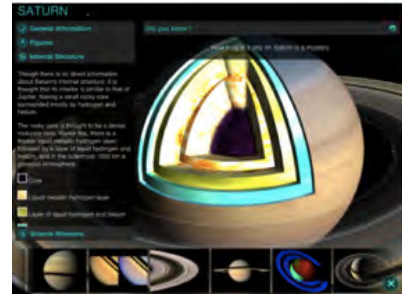
Details: Pronetis Kids, www.pronetis.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 2-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, shapes, colors, numerals, animals. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 10/9/2012. [WB]

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

Speedster

Speedster is one of a series of Worx Toys vehicles that come with clear plastic shells so you can see the insides light up in response to movement or a sequence of code keys. Each vehicle comes with a storybook about the vehicle. While the car we tested "looks cool" and is "solid" it doesn't do much other than make some sounds and flash. There are four keys that can be pressed in sequence that can be used to make specific sound effects, or to light up certain parts of the car, but you you need a code sheet to remember what code to enter. In addition, it is hard to distinguish between the different lighting effects. Besides the ability to open the doors, this doesn't do much, which disappointed our testers. It can't be steered or driven, and the sounds and lighting effects seem random. Other Worx vehicles include a police helicopter ($35) and a fire truck ($50).

Details: Worx Toys, www.worxtoys.com. Price: $30. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: cars, parts of cars, auto design. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.9 stars. Entry date: 10/24/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	58%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	4	
Design Features	5	
Good Value	5	

Tiny Drivers: Schoolbus

Tiny Drivers: Schoolbus introduces the letters of the alphabet by way of a nicely illustrated school bus and a good metaphor (picking up letter sounds). But the app is spoiled by clumsy interactivity and limited content. The bus is hard to drive, and you don't know how to get the kids off the bus at the end of their ride. Some of the items, such as O for Octopus, seem out of place on a bus. There are two modes: Show and Tell and Letter Search.

Details: TouchTilt Games, www.touchtilt.com . Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: letters, early reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 10/18/2012. [WB]

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

Toca Tailor

While this app isn't as simple to use as Toca Hair Salon, Toca Tailor manages capture the same irreverent creative flavor, while offering a lot more to do from a creativity angle. This includes designing and styling outfits for four "discerning and quirky characters," choosing patterns, adjusting hemlines or lengthening the sleeves. You can also add signature designer buttons, pockets and other details. You can mix and match pre-set colors, prints and fabrics, or take a photo of a pattern using your camera. Want some denim for a shirt? Use your own jeans. When you're finished, you can take photos of your final design creations and save them in your photo library for sharing. Content includes a small library of hats, shoes, bags and glasses, four characters to dress (both male and female), 24 fabric patterns, 24 different clothing details and 30 accessories like shoes. There is no advertising or in-app purchases. This is one of the few dress up experiences not loaded with gender stereotypes; which is especially noteworthy.

Details: Toca Boca, http://tocaboca.com/. Price: $0.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 10/12/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	90%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	10	
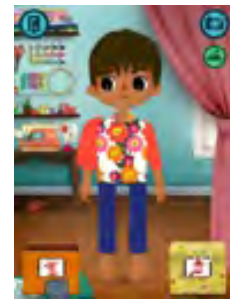
Future Releases & Updates

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.


AppCrayon

Finally...an iPad stylus that's light, cheap, and fun to use. And, it works with other types of tablets or smart phones other than the iPad -- any type of capacitive touch screen.

App Crayon ($9.99, www.appcrayon.com), available online, is a triangle-shaped 4 inch stylus made of soft rubber. It has black strips of conductive material on the side that effectively transfers your capacitive charge down to the squishy stylus tip, giving you an extension of your finger.

The triangular shape is easy to grip and it won't roll off the table. A loop on the end makes it possible to put it on a lanyard. The only drawback might be that kids -- and dogs -- will want to chew on it. We've been informed that schools and educators can contact www.dano2.com directly to request direct purchase.

Details: Dano Toys, www.appcrayon.com. Price: $9.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: a stylus for the iPad and other capacitive screens. Entry date: 3/30/2012.
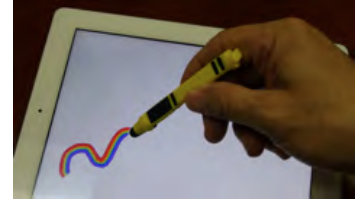
Dragon Ball Z for Kinect

This Teen rated action game for Kinect lets you perform all your favorite Dragon Ball Z moves with physical motions... so no more twitching. There are 100 moves, including long range blast attacks (Kamehameha, Spirit Bomb, Final Flash, Special Beam Cannon) and close range melee attacks (Jab, Uppercut, Hook, Charge Ki, Guard, Kick).

Content includes 50 playable characters and QR code functionality so you can hold up a QR code to unlock content in the game. Game Modes include: Story Mode - with battles and events following the story of Dragon Ball, which uses anime-style camerawork; and Score Attack Mode - defeat opponents in 1-on-1 battles to get the highest score. Developed by Spike Chunsoft Co., Ltd. for Namco Bandai.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., www.namcobandaigames.com. Price: $40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: physical coordination. Entry date: 6/14/2012.

GoSmart Stylus

Designed for capacitive screens (such as on the iPad or most Android screens) this wire-tipped stylus it is made of "ergonomically designed solid aluminum" and features a "flexible patent-pending see-through Teflon coated stainless steel tip for precision pointing". There are two models: the 300 Series which is a rocket-shape style and the 200 Series which is shaped like a pen. Both models include magnets to attach to newer iPads. Designed for professionals, this is not a good choice for children.

Details: GoSmart, Inc., www.justgosmart.com. Price: $25. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: touchscreen stylus. Entry date: 9/14/2012.

Gripcase

One of our favorite foam iPad Protection cases (see also Big Grips), Gripcase comes is your choice of five different colors and has handles that can let you hang your iPad from a hook. We also liked how the foam doesn't block the key ports or speakers. We've been told that a stand is in the works.

Details: Gripcase-USA, www.gripcase-usa.com. Price: $39.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: a protection device for iPad. Entry date: 10/17/2012.

Hexbug Scarab XL

The Hexbug Scarab XL is a noisy, rather creepy robotic bug with six legs that can really scurry across the room at least when the batteries are fresh. Powered by three AAA batteries (for the bug) and one 9 volt (for the remote) the critter can pop from its back to its feet if it is placed upside down.

 Using the tank-track like controls, our testers were able to easily maneuver the Scarab around objects, on both carpet and wooden floors. The two-channel remote has three forward moving speeds (slow, medium and fast), and one reverse speed, allowing children to operate multiple bugs independently with multiple remotes, or at the same time and with a single remote. The bug comes in green or blue see through case, so you can see the gears at work. It is one of two large-sized products from Innovation First.

Details: Innovation First, Inc., www.hexbug.com. Price: $40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: playing with robots. Entry date: 10/22/2012.

Hexbug Spider XL

The Hexbug Spider XL is a mechanical six-legged crawling spider-like robot with a remote control that features 360 degree steering, an LED eye, and two-channel, user selectable radio-controlled remote control. The two-channel remote control has three forward moving speeds (slow, medium and fast) and one speed when in reverse, enabling you to operate multiple bugs independently or at the same time and at varying speeds.

This is the largest member of the Hexbug family, standing 7 inches tall. It is also the most sophisticated -- the legs move in coordination to provide forward or turning motion. Three AA batteries are required in each HEXBUG Spider XL and one 9V battery is required in each remote. It is available in translucent red or blue.

Details: Innovation First, Inc., www.hexbug.com. Price: $40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: playing with robots. Entry date: 10/22/2012.

Kids Adjustable Activity Table for iPad, The

The Kids Adjustable Activity Table for iPad by CTA Digital is designed to "protect the iPad from bumps and damage." The table offers a "child-size desk space with a special iPad holder tray and stand." The tray can be adjusted to make a flat table surface; the legs to three heights. The removable tablet tray in the center of the table holds the iPad with a fitted cover and features a clear touch screen protector to guard against smudges. Designed for the iPad 2 and iPad 3.

Details: CTA Digital, http://ctadigital.com . Price: $50. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: a peripheral for iPad. Entry date: 9/14/2012.

ORB, The

RC (Radio Control) flying toys are commonplace, but most resemble some form of a helicopter. Not this one. The Orb is an attempt to design an "un-crashable" flying toy, by putting the two counter-rotating rotors inside a circular ridge foam cage, and calling the whole thing an alien spacecraft. The effect is enhanced by green LED lights that look like eyes. Despite being a bit heavier than most helicopters, our testers found it easy to fly and they liked the way it could bounce off of ceilings or light fixtures and in most cases, keep on flying. Features include a patented "Auto-Upright" technology that enables the ORB to lift straight up from any surface. It addition, it always lands upright. To charge, you must plug the toy into the controller, which houses six AA batteries which are not included.

Details: EB Brands, www.ebbrands.com. Price: $50. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: a flying toy. Entry date: 10/4/2012.

PES 2013: Pro Evolution Soccer

Designed to run on all consoles, Pro Evolution Soccer 2013 "now offers more freedom to play any kind of ball, which for the first time includes full control over shooting and the first touch." This edition "emphasizes the individual styles of the world's best players."

Features include better dribble and pass options, improved accuracy, timing and options in defense and Player ID, which captures the physical features and skills sets of the world's top players.

Details: Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc., www.konami.com. Price: $60. Ages: 8-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, Nintendo 3DS, Windows, PS2, PSP. Teaches/Purpose: sports, soccer. Entry date: 9/28/2012.

Smash Your Food

You can tell a child that a bottle of soda is full of sugar; or a donut is full of fat. But seeing is believing. This app, adapted from the flash-based web site called http://smashyourfood.foodnme.com/en/, is designed to teach children to make healthy choices by letting them squish a burger, crush a milkshake, or explode a can of soda, by dragging a finger down the screen. Children will learn how much fat or sugar is in their favorite junk foods, and hopefully will be encouraged to make smarter choices. The free Lite version comes with a limited set of foods; the full version costs $2.99.

Details: Food N' Me, http://smashyourfood.foodnme.com/en/. Price: $free. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: nutrition. Entry date: 10/25/2012.

Tot Yoga HD

Tot Yoga, for iPad & iPhone uses animated trees to provide demonstrations for 13 yoga poses. Each pose is demonstrated by animated trees, who do their move along with background music. The narration is provided by children. Children are encouraged to move, growl, bounce and rest. The idea is that you could hook this app up to a big screen, and let children follow along. See the publisher video: bit.ly/totyogavid2. There are no in-app sales, ads or external links.

Details: Holt Smith, www.holtsmith.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 2-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: heath, physical education, movement. Entry date: 11/6/2012.