20 Educational Apps Approved By Parents

By [Katie Lepi](http://www.edudemic.com/author/katie/) on November 14, 2012

It’s not easy being a parent. But the influx of technology into parenting and the day-to-day lives of children is too big to ignore. The emergence of the Internet has left no part of our lives untouched, and while for today’s adults this means having to keep up with the rate of change, like a treadmill, for our children it’s more like the ocean they are born to swim in.

While it can seem that they take to the proliferation of gadgets and apps more naturally than we do, it’s incumbent upon us to try as hard as we can to stay ahead of the game and ensure that their tech time is spent constructively.

The best approach is to be proactive and provide kids with fun, enriching activities in the digital realm. Here are Best College Online’s recommended educational apps and other electronic products:

1. [**Shake-a-Phrase**](http://www.shakeaphrase.com/)

From Artgig Studios, this $1.99 app for the iPhone and iPad makes language learning fun. Using the Story Starter function, you can begin to compose an amusing tale. Then, each time you shake the device, it produces a new wacky sentence, scrambling the words at random, not unlike Mad Libs. One of the sample sentences given: “The fanciful sailor yelled at and saved the chilly witch.” When you see a word you don’t recognize, you can tap that word and get a definition. There’s also a quiz mode.

1. [**abc PocketPhonics**](http://www.appsinmypocket.com/)

This app teaches kids to sound out and combine letters, and even includes a handwriting tool so they can trace letters with their fingers. It’s available for $2.99 in the App Store.

1. [**Jungle Time**](http://jungleeducation.com/)

Jungle Time, available for the iPad and iPhone, aims to teach young children how to tell time. Its appealing graphics (different cartoon animal faces appear as the “face” of the clock) is sure to amuse.

1. [**BrainPOP Featured Movie**](http://www.brainpop.com/about/mobile/)

Every day, a different short educational animated movie is showcased by the edutainment specialists at BrainPOP, which was created by Avraham Kadar, M.D., an immunologist and pediatrician. BrainPOP has a huge stash of resources in the categories of Science, Social Studies, English, Math, Engineering & Tech, Health, and Arts & Music, plus extra features such as, currently, a spotlight on the election.

1. [**The Elements: A Visual Exploration**](http://periodictable.com/ipad/)

This super-cool iPad app is an interactive periodic table that lets you explore the world of chemistry and examine specimens of each element up close (even in 3D … though it’s BYOG, bring your own glasses)! It’s also available for the iPhone, though the big screen adds a lot.

1. [**Intro to Math**](http://montessorium.com/)

The visual elegance of this app from Montessorium led to it being featured in an Apple ad. Its interactive modules teach basic counting skills. Montessorium also offers other apps, all informed, of course, by the Montessori teaching philosophy, such as Intro to Letters, Intro to Geography, and the newly revamped Alpha Writer.

1. [**Britannica Kids: Dinosaurs**](http://corporate.eb.com/apps/)

Though Encyclopedia Britannica has had a hard couple of decades, getting pummeled first by Encarta CD-ROMs and then by Wikipedia, and finally announced this year they would cease publishing a paper edition, they still exist as an electronic concern, and have begun creating educational apps rich with the kind of detail you’d expect. Besides Dinosaurs, they offer immersive educational experiences in U.S. Presidents, Snakes, Knights and Castles, Aztec Empire, Ancient Rome, Rainforests, Solar System, Ancient Egypt, and Volcanoes.

1. [**Word Whiz Electronic Flashcard**](http://omaha.learningexpresstoys.com/buy/lt6964/word-whiz-electronic-flashcard/)

This $16.99 toy tests and improves children’s word-building skills with three levels of difficulty. The goal is to build as many three-, four-, or five-letter words as possible within a minute. Perfect for kindergarteners who are enamored of gadgets and learning to wield words.

1. [**Kids Money**](http://www.appsrocket.com/kidsmoney.html)

A free app from AppsRocket, this tool is meant to help young children begin to understand the value of money and the idea of budgeting. They can use it to track their allowance savings until they reach a target amount to buy the treat of their choosing.

1. ****[**DragonBox**](http://dragonboxapp.com/)

Available for iPhone, iPod Touch Mac, iPad, and Android, this virtual card game does something brilliant: it begins to teach kids algebra without their knowing it. Better yet, it’s actually fun: you move through five “worlds” with 20 levels each, and as you solve equations, dragons hatch and grow. In Norway, where it was produced, it quickly became the #1 most downloaded app.

1. [**ALPHIE**](http://www.hasbro.com/playskool/en_US/shop/details.cfm?R=37C4291A-19B9-F369-10BF-EC1BA496D865:en_US&src=endeca&product_id=26979)

ALPHIE is a (rather adorable) toy robot designed to teach preschoolers letters, numbers, words, shapes, and more. He comes with 30 double-sided cards that you can insert into his torso to engage him on these assorted subjects, whereupon he talks, quizzes you, and even plays music.

1. **My Smart Hands**

This $4.99 app is a sign language dictionary designed to help you teach signing to your baby. Whether you or your child is hearing impaired or not, this could be a great educational opportunity for one or both of you.

1. [**Mindflex**](http://mindflexgames.com/what_is_mindflex.php)

Not an educational tool *per se*, this toy nonetheless may spark an interest in neuroscience and even teaches children to manipulate their own mental states. It’s a ball game you play by means of biofeedback, using your brainwaves to levitate a ball through a series of obstacles.

1. [**Touch Physics**](http://www.gamez4touch.com/TouchPhysics/index_html)

In this 50-level game, free to download at the App Store, players attempt to move a purple wheel past obstacles to a yellow star, using a magic crayon (like Harold of children’s-book fame). It models the real laws of physics and can be quite challenging in a way that’s bound to prove especially addictive for kids.

1. [**Bookworm**](http://www.popcap.com/games/bookworm/iphone)

Link letter blocks to form words in this $2.99 iPhone game from PopCap (also available for MAC, PC, and Nintendo DS). Bookworm is a good vocabulary builder for kids and a great diversion for adults.

1. [**Magic Piano**](http://www.smule.com/magicpiano/)

This piano game is a great way to get kids interested in learning to play the real thing. Though the interface is more like Dance Dance Revolution or Guitar Hero than the traditional ebony and ivory, it does allow your fingers to form real chords.

1. [**Park Math**](http://www.duckduckmoosedesign.com/educational-iphone-itouch-apps-for-kids/park-math/)

This jaunty math game won a 2011 Silver Award from the Parents’ Choice Foundation, the 2010 Best Kids’ iPhone/iPod App of the Year Award from iLounge, and a Children’s Technology Review Editor’s Choice Award for Excellence in Design. It features 7 mini-games where, for example, you learn greater than/less than by balancing a seesaw, or learn subtraction as apples fall from a tree.

1. [**Grover’s Number Special**](http://www.ideotoylab.com/sesamestreet/grovers-number-special.html)

Big Bird lives! IDEO Toy Lab has partnered with Sesame Street to produce a line of fun apps featuring original video of everybody’s favorite educational Muppets. In this one, you help Grover, who’s moonlighting as a waiter, to count and add up ingredients to serve an angry customer, since the chef hasn’t shown up for work.

1. [**SmartGlobe**](http://www.worldglobes.com/educational-globes/interactive/thespecialeditionsmartglobev3.cfm)

This interactive globe has content for ages 5+, 8+, and 15+, and has an attached SmartPen so you can point at spots on the globe and hear informative audio files. There are also six games, including multiplayer functionality so you can play along with your child.

1. [**Stack the States**](http://dan-russell-pinson.com/2010/09/03/stack-the-states/)

Can you still name all 50 state capitals? This app by Dan Russell-Pinson is kind of like the Tetris of U.S. geography: you stack up states after correctly answering questions about them, which in turn unlocks three bonus games: Pile Up, Puzzler, and Capital Drop.