

PARENTS PASS-BACK MOBILE DEVICES TO CHILDREN BUT ARE SKEPTICAL OF EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

Report from the Joan Ganz Cooney Center Finds Parents Doubt Educational Value of Mobile Apps But Support New Experimentation

New York, NY, November 10, 2010 – The explosive growth of mobile media is a current topic of discussion as parents, educators and scholars question whether young children should be using these devices. [*Learning: Is there an app for that?*](#), a report released today by [the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop](#), in collaboration with [PBS KIDS Raising Readers](#) and [Hotspex](#), is the first report to inform the debate based on a national survey of parents and scientific observation of children’s learning and interaction with mobile media. The report found that most parents let young children use their mobile devices despite perceptions that such play is not educationally beneficial. Counter to these concerns, the studies found that a new phenomenon has emerged -- the pass-back effect -- where parents hand smartphones, like the iPhone, to their young kids. The report details evidence on when and how mobile media can help young children by promoting literacy skills they can learn from high quality apps.

Learning: Is there an app for that?, presents the results of three new studies that provide implications and insights for the industry, content development, research design and practice, including:

- **The mobile media pass-back effect is a new phenomenon** - Two-thirds of children ages 4-7 have used an iPhone or iPod touch and 85% have used one owned by a parent. Children most often use the devices when they are passed-back by a parent while in a car.
- **There is evidence that kids can learn from apps** - Mobile applications based on PBS KIDS programs MARTHA SPEAKS and SUPER WHY! were independently evaluated with 90 children ages 3-7 who played with them for 2 weeks. Children made gains in vocabulary comprehension, letter-identification and rhyming after use of the apps. Vocabulary improved as much as 31 percent for children who played with the MARTHA SPEAKS Dog Party app.
- **Young children are surprisingly adept at using smart mobile devices** - Nearly all of the children observed in the studies could master operations, even after initial difficulty.

Evidence that children learn from well-designed educational apps signals a new challenge to produce quality content and provide guidance for developers. The report outlines recommendations including:

- **Design developmentally appropriate apps** – Applications should center on relevant, age-appropriate content that balances engagement with learning. They should also account for children’s developing motor skills.
- **Create apps that sustain interest** – Children use apps for short periods of time and interest quickly diminishes. Developers should design activities that incorporate specific educational goals and incentives to hold their interest.

- **Use mobile devices as supplemental tools** – App content can be developed around curriculum goals in literacy, math and science as well as life skills to supplement and extend school-based learning.
- **Inform parents** – App developers' claims of educational impact are largely unsubstantiated and should be based on specific evidence. Parents need more information from consumer groups and educators on how mobile devices can and should be used as learning tools.

“Parents and educators of young children today face a new reality - mobile media are everywhere and curious minds and hands want to explore them,” said Dr. Michael H. Levine, Executive Director of the Joan Ganz Cooney Center “While mobile kids are here to stay, this study shows that the impact on their learning is still up for grabs. New research and design investments are urgently needed to unlock the potential of mobile devices and to reassure parents that the pass-back effect will be a positive one.”

"We know that when children are engaged, they learn, so when mobile apps are fun, entertaining and developmentally appropriate, they can be powerful educational tools," said Lesli Rotenberg, Senior Vice President, Children's Media, PBS. "This research shows that PBS is effectively using this new platform to help kids build critical skills. We will use it to guide our development of future apps that continue to improve the value of children's screen time with significant educational outcomes."

The report was written to analyze the recent explosion of children’s media consumption on mobile devices such as the iPhone. The iPhone, iPod touch and iPad dominate the top three spots on children’s holiday wish lists this year, according a Duracell poll of children in the UK. A 2009 content analysis conducted by The Cooney Center revealed that 60 percent of the 25 top-selling paid applications in the education section of the iTunes App Store target toddlers and preschoolers. In addition, a Kaiser Family Foundation study confirmed children’s usage of such devices is growing rapidly, noting that children spend an average of about one hour per day using mobile devices.

Learning: Is there an app for that?, written by Cynthia Chiong and Carly Shuler, is available for download on The Cooney Center website at <http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org/Reports.html>

The studies featured in the report are part of PBS KIDS Raising Readers, an initiative funded by a Ready To Learn grant from the U.S. Department of Education, part of a cooperative agreement with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), PBS and The Ready To Learn Partnership. The studies were conducted in cooperation with PBS, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Sesame Workshop, market research firm HotSpex and the independent research firm Rockman et al.

[The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop](#) is an independent, non-profit research group that is fostering innovation in children’s learning through digital media. The center conducts and supports research, creates educational models and interactive media properties, and builds cross-sector partnerships. It is named for Sesame Workshop's founder, who revolutionized television with the creation of *Sesame Street*.

Core funding is provided by the generous support of Peter G. Peterson and Sesame Workshop.

Founded over 10 years ago, Hotspex is helping the marketing world discover the hidden truth behind consumer behavior – emotions, feelings and relationships towards brands and marketing ideas. Across the world's major markets, decision-makers from leading manufacturers, retailers and service providers continuously rely on us for our insights, innovation and technology. Engaged consumers, by the millions, have their say in shaping products and experiences through our interactive surveys. For more information, please visit: www.hotspex.biz.

[PBS KIDS](#) offers all children the opportunity to explore new ideas and new worlds through television, online and community-based programs. PBS is a nonprofit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's nearly 360 public television stations, serving more than 124 million people on-air and online each month.

#

Contacts:
Jodi Lefkowitz
The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop
212-875-6497
jodi.lefkowitz@sesameworkshop.org

Maria Vera
PBS
703-739-3225
mvera@pbs.org

The contents of this release were developed under a grant, #PRU295A050003 and #PRU295B050003, from the U.S. Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.