

Technology in Children's Programming

Apps for Children with Special Needs

MELANIE A. LYTTLE

What makes a good app? Where can we use apps in the library with children? Which should we use? A further question might involve the selection of good apps for children with special needs, which is a question a parent might ask a librarian.

There has been much information unearthed on the Internet. Lately, I have started to feel that giving advice to parents about which apps to use with their children should come with the same sort of disclaimer that I give when "not" providing medical or legal advice to patrons. I begin with, "Here is what I have found while searching on the Internet for you. I believe the information comes from reputable sources, but it is up to you to decide if this works in your situation."

Keep in mind that what makes a good app for special needs children is still the same thing as what makes a good app for any child. Parents are obviously the best evaluators of appropriateness for their individual children. I will say that PBS has another article that gives its "6 Tips for Buying Children's Apps," and its tips are very short and to the point.¹ I like it very much.

The following are a small handful of reputable sources for apps for special needs children. Note, however, that Internet sources and information can go out of date or existence quickly.

Apps and Autism: Tools to Serve Children with Special Needs. This is my favorite collection of good apps. It includes one of the few, if only, descriptions of what makes a good app for a special needs child specifically—even if this article deals with children on the autism spectrum only.²

The Best iPad Apps for Special Needs Kids. The Washington Post collected and published a list of apps with the help of an author who writes about assistive technologies. The apps focus on children having trouble in school. While helpful, I still wonder if this would be what you want to give parents when they ask you for help with their special needs child. Its definition of "special needs" is significantly more broad than most parents might assume.³

Our Favorite Apps for Children Who are Visually Impaired. This comes from a site that is affiliated with Perkins School for the Blind. It's the only site I would consider a reputable source for this very specific special need.⁴

Power Up! Apps for Kids with Special Needs and Learning Differences. This collection was created by Common Sense Media. While it could be argued that what they are considering "special needs" might not be what most of us would consider



Melanie A. Lyttle is Head of Public Services at Madison (OH) Public Library and a member of the ALSC Children and Technology Committee. The committee also includes Amy Graves, chair; Cen Campbell; Melissa Depper; Liz Fraser; Robin Gibson; Rachel Keeler; Marianne Martens; Rachael Medina; and Andrea Vernola.

special needs, it still in an interesting collection of resources.⁵

There are repetitions of certain apps across the different review sites, but that's OK. At least it means that different groups of people think the same app is pretty awesome. However, it's important to give a "shout out" to some other favorite sites that review apps, even if it they are not specifically geared toward special needs children. They may still help the parents or other adults who are asking you for app recommendations in the first place.

10 Best Apps for Preschoolers. Coming from Parents online, this is a great starting point for apps for this age. They are definitely edutainment apps, but still a fun list.⁶

Apps Discussed on Little eLit. OK, it's a plug to fellow Children and Technology Committee member Cen Campbell and her great group of fellow librarians at Little eLit. They have an amazing collection of apps they recommend for storytimes or the app versions of great children's books. It's a long and helpful list.⁷

Play and Learn. This is a component of the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media website. They have a collection of reviewed apps there. And this is an amazing organization doing amazing things, so you know what they include on their website has to be good.⁸

Now go out and recommend apps, or better yet, test out some apps yourself and find ones that you like! ☺

References

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3. Mari-Jane Williams, "The Best Ipad Apps for Special Needs Kids," accessed January 31, 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/the-best-apps-for-special-needs-kids/2012/04/18/gIQA1FwiQT_story.html.
4. "Our Favorite Apps for Children Who are Visually Impaired," WonderBaby.org, accessed January 31, 2014, www.wonderbaby.org/articles/apps-for-children-who-are-visually-impaired.
5. "Power Up! Apps for Kids with Special Needs and Learning Differences," Common Sense Media, accessed January 31, 2014, www.commonsensemedia.org/guide/special-needs.
6. Tara Rummell Berson, "10 Best Apps for Preschoolers," accessed January 31, 2014, www.parents.com/fun/entertainment/gadgets/best-apps-for-preschoolers/#page=2.
7. "Apps Discussed on Little eLit," Little eLit, accessed January 31, 2014, <http://littleelit.com/app-lists-reviews/apps-discussed-on-little-elit>.
8. "Play and Learn," Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media, accessed January 31, 2014, www.fredrogerscenter.org/resources/play-and-learn.

REFORMA Seeks Applications for Mora Award

REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library and Information Services to Latinos and the Spanish-speaking, invites applications for the 2014 Estela and Raúl Mora Award. The award was established by author and poet Pat Mora and her siblings in honor of their parents and to promote El día de los niños/El día de los libros (Children's Day/Book Day), or El día de los jóvenes/ El día de los libros (Youth Day/Book Day), also known as Día.

The award is presented annually to the most exemplary celebration of this year-long initiative that links all children to books, languages, and cultures. Celebrations are traditionally held on or near April 30.

Libraries, schools, educational institutions, and other youth-serving organizations that plan and implement Día programs during 2014 are encouraged to submit an application by August 15, 2014. The award will be announced in October 2014 and presented at the American Library Association's 2015 Midwinter Meeting. The Mora Award consists of a \$1,000 stipend and a commemorative plaque.

Application guidelines are available on the REFORMA website at www.reforma.org or at <http://www.patmora.com/mora-award>. For more information, contact Lupita Vega, chair of the 2014 Mora Award Committee, at lupitavega2@hotmail.com.