Putting the education back in “educational” apps

Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Ph.D.
Unidel H. Rodney Sharp Professor
University of Delaware

Date: February 13, 2015
Time: 1:00pm
Location: SAC 303

Abstract:
We – and especially our children -- are in the midst of a vast, unplanned experiment, surrounded by digital technologies that were not available but five years ago. At the apex of this boom is the introduction of applications (“apps”) for tablets and smartphones. So-called “educational apps” – which as of July 2014 stand at 75,000 in the App Store (Apple, 2014) - are largely unregulated and untested. This talk offers a way to think about the potential educational impact of current and future apps. Building on decades of work from the Science of Learning, which has examined how children learn best, we abstract a set of principles for two ultimate goals. First, we aim to guide researchers, educators, and designers in evidence-based app development. Second, the creation of an evidence-based guide will contribute to setting a new standard for evaluating and selecting the most effective existing children’s apps. In short, this talk presents one way to align the design and use of educational apps with known processes of children’s learning and development and offers a framework that can be used by parents and designers alike. Apps designed to promote active, engaged, meaningful and socially interactive learning (4 pillars) within the context of a supported learning goal emerge as those that are not just called “educational” but that are truly educational. With school districts adopting apps for classroom use, policymakers may also be interested in considering these guidelines for thinking about educational apps.

Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, Ph.D., is the Unidel H. Rodney Sharp Professor of Education, Psychology, and Linguistics and Cognitive Science at the University of Delaware and director of two laboratories: The Infant Language Project and the Shape Up! Lab. She has held the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship (1988) and the James McKeen Cattell (1988) sabbatical award for her research on language development. She also won the America Psychological Association’s Distinguished Service Award (2009) and the Urie Bronfenbrenner Award for Lifetime Contribution to Developmental Psychology in the Service of Science and Society (2011). She is the 2011 recipient of the Frances Alison award from the University of Delaware, the highest honor bestowed upon a faculty member. In 2015, she will accept the James McKeen Cattell Fellow Award from the Association for Psychological Science for “a lifetime of outstanding contributions to applied psychological research.” She recently was named a Distinguished Scientific Lecturer by the American Psychological Association.

She has received funding for her research from the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Institute of Education Sciences. She was an associate editor of Child Development, the premier journal in her field. In addition to over 150 journal publications and book chapters, she has authored 12 books and monographs. Passionate about the dissemination of psychological science for improving our schools and families’ lives, she also writes books for parents and practitioners. How Babies Talk: The Magic and Mystery of Language Development in the First Three Years of Life (1999) was praised by Berry Brazelton and Steven Pinker. To reveal the benefits of playful learning, she wrote the award-winning Einstein Never Used Flash Cards: How Our Children Really Learn and Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less (2004) and A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool: Presenting the Evidence (2009). Her latest book, The Learning Illusion is under contract.

Dr. Golinkoff lectures internationally about language development, play and playful learning, and spatial development. With her longstanding collaborator Kathy Hirsh-Pasek of Temple University, she co-founded the Ultimate Block Party movement to celebrate the science of learning. The first event was held in October 2010 in Central Park in New York City and attracted over 50,000 people (www.UltimateBlockParty.org). Additional Block Parties were held in Baltimore and Toronto in 2011. She is also co-founder of LearnNow, a website designed to give away the science of learning. She has appeared on numerous radio and television shows and in print media and never turns down an opportunity to spread the findings of psychological science to the lay public.