

JULY 6, 2010, 10:30 AM ET

## App Watch: PBS Sees Potential in iPhone as Children's Toy

For many kids growing up in a world of gadgets, Apple's iPhone can seem like little more than a cool toy.



Rapunzel let down her long \_\_\_\_\_.

PBS Kids

The "Super Why!" application aims to teach kids to read.

Nevermind the price tag or the fact that the phone helped revolutionize mobile devices. Kids, of course, like to poke around on the screen and watch animation. And many parents have found that the gadget can be a great diversion, if they can get over their fear of their children breaking the device.

A whole category of applications has sprung up for very young children who play on mobile gadgets. And [PBS Kids](#), the children's division of the Public Broadcasting System, is aiming to do for this medium what it did with programming on television — make it educational.

"Our specialty has always been in informal education," said Lesli Rotenberg, the senior vice president of children's media at PBS.

"We can make a really big difference even when kids aren't in school."

The organization has several applications available on the iPhone, and in a study funded by the U.S. Department of Education, one of the applications improved vocabulary by as much as 31%.

In that application, "Martha Speaks Dog Party," kids learn vocabulary words by choosing the right dog dish and playing other games. Another application, "Super Why!," helps children learn to read by picking letters on a path and lets them practice writing on the iPhone's touch screen using a magic wand. The "Mister Rogers Make a Journal" app lets pre-schoolers draw pictures about their feelings, and a variety of "Sesame Street" applications help teach kids to count and read.

The apps are designed for different age groups, and some are appropriate for children as young as two or three — kids who were born after the first iPhone came out. A few apps are free, but most are \$1.99 and \$2.99.

"It's great for [kids] developmentally because their little fingers can really manipulate things more easily on a touch screen than they can on a mouse," Ms. Rotenberg said of the applications, which work on the iPod touch as well.

For many of the applications, PBS commissioned outside developers to work on the applications along with the producers of the shows, Ms. Rotenberg said. But PBS doesn't own the programs, and producers are free to make their own applications, as was the case with the "Sesame Street" apps.

The apps produced by PBS focus on literacy, because the group has the most experience with teaching reading skills and wanted to start there, Ms. Rotenberg said. "Our next frontier is science, technology, engineering and math," she said.

PBS emphasizes tools that can help disadvantaged children and anticipates that the technology in the iPhone will become widely available in even low-income families despite its current price.

“We’ve been surprised by a lot of the research that’s been done [on other technology]. ... The [Nintendo] DS, the PlayStation, those kinds of tools are already really widely penetrated in low-income homes,” so it’s likely the iPhone and iPod touch will be that popular in low-income households as well, Ms. Rotenberg said. She added that PBS hopes to work with hardware manufacturers to make the technology available for children, once it develops more applications and proves that they help kids learn.

[Previously on App Watch](#)

Copyright 2008 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our [Subscriber Agreement](#) and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit [www.djreprints.com](http://www.djreprints.com)