



CINEKID

App of the Year for Early Learning

Jury report 2014

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About the award

This is the first year for the Early Learning App of the Year award. Eligible apps were those that target children aged 0 to 6 years old and were published between July 1, 2013 and July 1, 2014 in the Dutch App Store. Productions must be, or have been, available/publicly accessible to their target audience. Productions should be in Dutch, exceptions were made when a foreign language was not an obstacle for its accessibility.

The jury (named above) are all professionals with experience in children's apps. Jury members individually evaluated all nominated apps using a pre-determined evaluation scheme look at both quality of the app (i.e., artwork, interactivity, design, usability, sound, storyline) as well as age appropriateness (i.e., colors, simplicity, comprehensibility, engagement, independency, fun, familiarity, activation, artwork, and cognitive match). The jury met on October 15, 2014 to merge these individual evaluations and select the top three apps. A decision was only considered final when a consensus among all three jury members was reached.

Early Learning App of the Year Winner

The winner of the 2014 early learning app of the year award is Toca Pet Doctor. All three jury members found this app to be an excellent early childhood app. As one juror exclaimed, "who wouldn't want to untangle the worm?" In a safe and humorous manner, this app encourages children to practice their natural desire to care for others by encouraging children to take care of sick and injured pets. The app does an excellent job of integrating varied repetition into its design such that children consistently practice healing and caring for the pets, but each time this experience is just different enough to keep the child engaged and wanting more. Importantly, it doesn't rely on a one-off approach. Instead, once the pet has been cared for, children will find that pet is now sleeping happily - demonstrating valuable lessons of cause and effect. It also offers opportunities for joint play whereby parents or caregivers can easily help care and feed the animals, while simultaneously talking about the importance of caring for others. Finally, all jurors remarked that this app offers great lessons for designers. It relies on a concept that is familiar and important for young children - caring and helping others - and provides its young users with a responsive easy-to-use interface where children can practice this skill. It truly captures children's natural play patterns, and is highly deserving of the title "app of the year"!

Runner-Up

Initially, the jury was tasked with identifying a second and third place app. However, it quickly became clear that this would not be so easy. The jury found that some of the other nominees had created a particularly good app that would be most suitable for the upper age range of this award while other



nominees had created a product that was most suitable for the younger age range of this award. As such, the jury opted to create two 2nd place awards that reflect these developmental differences.

Runner-Up: Younger Children

Of all of the nominees, one app in particular stood out to the jury as being particularly well-suited for younger children: Sago Mini Monster. Like Toca Pet Doctor, jury members felt that this app does a great job at modelling cause and effect relationships in an accessible and easy-to-use manner. One jury member noted that this app “makes your finger feel very powerful!” as children practice their creative skills to transform a simple shape into a fun-loving monster. Importantly, the app brings up something that can be scary (a monster) in a playful and entertaining manner. Young children will love creating their very own monster who they can feed and dress up! And, in a way that connects with their own lives, they are sure to laugh when they find out that monsters also have to have their teeth brushed! The app itself is simple, intuitive, and is sure to be enjoyed by young children. The only downside? You cannot save your monster within the app. Jury members all commented that they wish they could save their monster in the app and come back to him later!

Runner-Up: Older Children

Just as Sago Mini Monster seemed particularly appropriate for younger children, jury members felt that Drei is an app that will appeal to the older end of the age group – and beyond. Drei, an app that encourages its users to employ skill and logic to battle gravity and build a tower, was unlike any of the other nominees. Called a “loose tooth app” by one of the jurors (since it can be just as frustrating as having a loose tooth), this app is not an easy one to defeat – and the challenges of defeating each level make it that much more appealing. The levels themselves are also quite intelligent. One of its key strengths that led jurors to examine it more carefully is its sophisticated collaborative integration. Unlike any other nominated app, success in the upper levels is dependent upon collaboration with other anonymous players that are simultaneously on the network. This collaboration is crucial to game success and encourages its users to learn how to work together. Jurors felt that this app is an example of an app that focuses on one thing, and does that one thing is done well. The jurors applauded the developers for not “talking down” to children but instead recognizing their innate abilities and giving them space to practice these abilities. That said, this was the app that the jury almost missed. Its initial usability could benefit from some enhancements, and it’s likely that parents might need to help kids get a feel for just how to use this app. But, once they get going, they won’t stop!



Trends in Apps

Jury members also discussed what they saw as key trends in app design. A common statement that was echoed several times is that although there are a lot of good apps, there are a far fewer amazing apps – and everyone would like to see this change. How? By recognizing that kids are critical consumers of apps and, just like their adult counterparts, deserve high-quality apps that take into account their needs. This means taking a child-centred approach to design. Developers should understand who youth are and what their unique needs are. Jurors would also like to see greater emphasis on the context of use as well as a move towards creating apps which successfully merge online play with offline play. With the increasing accessibility of software that enables many small publishers to do great things (e.g., Unity), combined with a greater effort to play-test apps, to consider the context of children’s app usage, and to bridge offline and online play, the app line-up for young children is sure to become filled with amazing apps – and make next year’s award selection even more challenging! We, as jurors, are up for the challenge and we hope app developers are too!

