

To: Campbell Hall Parents
From: Brian Woods
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Re: Educational Software

Now that the school year is in full swing, many parents consider purchasing software for their children. Before running out and buying just any software, it is important to obtain software that will truly benefit your child's learning. Unfortunately 90% to 95% of children's software—even though advertised as educational—has little learning value.

While early learning software is typically very engaging, parents rarely realize that all programs have inherent limitations. Below is an overview of software genres with their respective strengths. On the back is a list of several recommended programs for primary and intermediate grade students. I've included tips to consider when purchasing educational software.

Software Genres

Drill-And-Practice

Drill-and-practice software typically focuses on a specific subject (e.g. math) and involves memorization with rewards for correct answers. Examples include: time-telling, phonics, multiplication, and even keyboarding. Because, this genre focuses on recalling basic facts not developing higher level thinking skills, interaction is actually limited to pressing return or making a choice between the options presented. [Examples include: Reader Rabbit, Math Blaster, and many elements in the JumpStart series].

Exploratory

The activities built into exploratory programs often incorporate sounds and animation that generally make them very appealing. This genre allows learners to pursue their interests in an adventure style environment. Although activities allow children to pursue their own interests, there is little opportunity for self-expression or creativity. Most commercially available educational software falls under this category. This genre generally targets primary learners. [Examples are: Just Grandma & Me, Thinkin' Things, Millie's Math House, and some elements in the JumpStart series].

Simulation

While very similar to the exploratory genre, this genre is usually a bit more academic as it provides virtual experiences of real-world activities and allows children to test limitations of concepts and theories. This genre often requires more thought as the child considers various and ongoing challenges as they pursue a given objective. Because this requires higher level thinking skills and reading skills, it most appropriate for students in the intermediate grades and above. [Examples are: MathKeys, Oregon Trail and Keyboarding].

Authoring

Authoring software is one of the most open and flexible of all genres and provides opportunities for self-expression. The greatest benefits are achieved when parental direction and feedback are given. This allows learners opportunities to illustrate their thoughts and diagram relationships. Learners can add, delete, or modify on-screen objects or drawings. The flexibility of authoring software allows the most creativity and at the same time a bit more structure and guidance. [Examples: KidPix, PowerPoint, and Inspiration].

Communication

Most Internet-based tools are found here. This is the only genre in which many learners can share ideas from a distance. With the increasing emphasis on research beginning in the intermediate grades, communication software will be very useful. These also require Internet access. [Examples: E-mail, Chat Rooms, WebPages].

Tips

Choose Thoughtfully

Buying software for entertainment is one thing, buying for learning is another. All software programs have inherent strengths and weaknesses based on the genre. Exploratory programs build fundamental mouse skills and promote curiosity; however, they often focus on lower level thinking skills and are best in the primary grades. Drill-and-practice programs help students recall information with increasing speed, yet rarely teach the underlying concepts. Introduce drill-and-practice programs once your child already has a handle on the basic concept. As your child moves into higher grades gradually transition toward the simulation, authoring, and communications programs which promote creativity and deeper understanding. These last three genres typically require children to continually think about which tool is best for a given purpose. Their open-ended nature also provides headroom for growth.

Look For Customization

Some programs allow the difficulty level to be changed to address the individual needs of your child. Software that includes sound and/or animation increases engagement.

Get The School Version

If possible, get the school version. Retail stores only carry the home version, which contains the program with a basic user manual. Educational software warehouses usually carry school versions, which include a binder with useful learning activities. School versions typically cost a little more, but are often worth the extra cost. Note: Type-To-Learn is an exception—buy the home version. The school version costs about \$100 more because it allows compared to five with the home version.

Help Make Connections

As much as possible, work with your child to help relate the computer activity to recent experiences or to topics your child is currently studying. Before purchasing, check with your child's teacher(s) to determine which units are currently being studied and how your child could benefit from computer-assisted learning at home. Should you have any questions, please check with me to determine the most appropriate software for your child. It is best to reach me via e-mail at woods@campbellhall.org.

Recommended Software Programs

Grades K-2	<u>Software Title</u>	<u>Genre</u>	<u>Discipline</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Cost</u>
	KidPix 4	Authoring	Graphic Arts	Win/Mac	\$79.95
	My Make Believe Castle	Exploratory	Problem-Solving	Win/Mac	\$40.00
	Thinkin' Things II or III	Exploratory	Multidisciplinary	Win/Mac	\$24.95
	Money Challenge	Drill and Practice	Math	Win/Mac	\$49.95
	Discover Time	Drill and Practice	Math	Win/Mac	\$49.95
	Type-To-Learn (Home Version)	Simulation	Multidisciplinary	Win/Mac	\$29.95
Grades 3-6	<u>Software Title</u>	<u>Genre</u>	<u>Discipline</u>	<u>Platform</u>	<u>Cost</u>
	Type-To-Learn (Home Version)	Simulation	Multidisciplinary	Win/Mac	\$29.95
	Inspiration (Personal Version)	Authoring	Multidisciplinary	Win/Mac	\$49.95
	Swamp Gas USA	Drill & Practice	Geography (Math)	Win/Mac	\$9.95
	My Make Believe Treasure Island	Exploratory	Problem-Solving	Windows	\$39.95
	Internet Access	Communications	Research	Win/Mac	\$20/Mo+

Software Vendors

The above programs are seldom found at typical retail stores (e.g. Fry's, Comp USA, Best Buy, etc). You'll likely have to order these programs through an educational software warehouse, such as one of the companies listed below. Consider requesting a software catalog or previewing the respective website to check out their full line of products. Also inquire about their preview policy as some provide a 30-day money-back preview period. Campbell Hall does not endorse any of these companies, we are simply providing choices.

<u>Company</u>	<u>Phone Number</u>	<u>Fax Number</u>	<u>URL</u>
Classroom Direct	800-248-9171	800-628-6250	www.classroomdirect.com
Educational Resources	800-624-2926	800-610-5005	www.edresources.com
Logo Computer Systems	800-321-5646	514-331-1380	www.microworlds.com
Sunburst Software	800-321-7511	914-747-4109	www.sunburst.com
Scholastic (for Inspiration)	800-724-4811	-----	www.scholastic.com