



## JOAN GANZ COONEY CENTER FINDS CAUSE FOR BOTH CONCERN AND OPTIMISM IN BILLION DOLLAR DIGITAL MEDIA INDUSTRY TARGETING KIDS 3-11

*D is for Digital*, New Report Released at CES' Sandbox Summit Analyzes Current Marketplace; Findings Include Shortfall of Digital Educational Products; Paper Recommends Better Communication Between Research Community and Media Developers and Urges Protection of Children From Growing Commercialism

New York and Las Vegas, January 8, 2008 - The [Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop](http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org) (www.joanganzcooneycenter.org), a newly established production and research institute studying digital media's educational potential, today released their latest report, *D is for Digital*, at the first-ever [Sandbox Summit: A Playdate with Technology](#). The report's key findings were unveiled by [Sesame Workshop](#) Executive Vice President Terry Fitzpatrick during a keynote address at the Summit, held in Las Vegas at the International Consumer Electronics Show and produced by The Consumer Electronics Association and Parents' Choice Foundation.

The 50-page study, the first to analyze the current interactive media environment for preschool and elementary age children, documents how the recent aging down and exponential growth of digital products are shaping how children, ages 3-11, live and learn. Of the 300+ products studied, the paper found that most do not take advantage of available research regarding children's educational needs particularly in a global economy where literacy and learning requirements are fast evolving. Among the findings, the survey yielded only two educational video games (in an industry that generated \$500 million in 2006 for the top 20 titles alone) based on explicit educational curriculum design available in the market.

The report also identified influential market trends with strong potential for education; examined the type of informal learning products on the market; and recommended ways to expand the availability of quality educational media for children.

The report's recommendations to industry, research and policymakers include:

- **Build Partnerships Between Research and Industry to Leverage Knowledge.** Tens of millions of dollars of public expenditure on digital media research are not benefiting industry practices and product design. Significant gaps in informational exchange between the research community and media developers are inhibiting valuable research from being seen and incorporated into products, thereby limiting potential benefit to kids. Findings should be disseminated regularly to non-academics and digital industry leaders through publications and events.
- **A New Emphasis on Educational Videogame Development.** An untapped market opportunity exists with few video game titles exhibiting an explicit educational purpose.
- **Encourage Intergenerational Interaction.** The majority of digital media products on the market are designed for use by one child in front of one screen. With research documenting the benefits of adult-child interactions and relationships, the industry should break the mold of the traditional model of one child per screen and encourage interaction.
- **Protect Children From Undocumented Educational Claims and Commercialism.** Changes in the advertising landscape support action to ensure that marketing claims about the educational value of digital

products are validated by independent research evidence. Industry and regulatory standards should be devised to monitor the media in an effort to protect children from improper commercialism in digital products.

“The study’s findings are cause for both concern and optimism,” said Dr. Michael Levine, Executive Director of the Joan Ganz Cooney Center. “While kids today are totally immersed in media, spending almost as much time with them as attending school, most of the new digital products are not informed by research. Producers and investors are missing a giant opportunity-- to promote the literacy, creativity and problem-solving skills children will need to cooperate and compete in a global economy. Industry leaders who develop new interactive educational media products based on the recommendations in this report will be richly rewarded with both a wise investment in a multi-billion dollar market, and in making a key contribution to preparing kids for the digital age.”

The recommendations were derived from a review in Fall 2007 which focused on mass-market informal learning products for children ages 3-11. The review recognizes and supports the evidence of growing media use by young children and the expanding media environment based on consumer market trends such as the popularity of virtual world web sites, video content and user generated content. *D is for Digital* was authored by Cooney Fellow Carly Shuler, an expert on marketing and the educational toy industry, and a graduate of Harvard’s Technology, Innovation and Education program.

The *D is for Digital* report and executive summary are available on the Joan Ganz Cooney Center website at <http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org/publications>.

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center is examining new media platforms such as the web, cell phones and video games to better understand their role in children’s learning and literacy development both in and out of school. Focusing especially on the needs of disadvantaged children, the Center conducts and supports research, creates educational models and interactive media properties, and builds cross-sector partnerships to scale-up best practices. Based at Sesame Workshop, the Joan Ganz Cooney Center is stimulating a national dialogue on how interactive technologies can be utilized to help accelerate children’s learning. The Center is named for Sesame Workshop’s founder, who revolutionized educational television with the creation of Sesame Street nearly four decades ago.

Contacts:

Ellen Lewis  
212-875-6396  
[ellen.lewis@sesameworkshop.org](mailto:ellen.lewis@sesameworkshop.org)

Jodi Lefkowitz  
212-875-6497  
At CES: 516-312-3378  
[jodi.lefkowitz@sesameworkshop.org](mailto:jodi.lefkowitz@sesameworkshop.org)

Sheila Feren  
FerenComm for Sesame Workshop  
212-983-9898  
[sheilaf@ferencomm.com](mailto:sheilaf@ferencomm.com)