



Vizzle

Monarch Teaching Technologies, Inc.

www.monarchteachtech.com/vizzle

22001 Fairmount Blvd.

Shaker Heights, OH 44118

800-592-1934

My kids love the computer! It has long been an important teaching tool in our house, particularly for my kids with Down syndrome, who benefit so much from the fun and repetition offered by educational computer programs. Flash cards just can't compete with interactive, entertaining, educational activities on a good program. Some programs do a great job of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of my child in a particular subject and tailoring lessons to just what he needs to be learning. These programs are usually very easy on the teacher (yeah!), but we've found that they often provide very few options (not so great!). On the other hand, some programs give the parent or child total control to choose what they work on and how they want to work on it, but they usually require extensive set-up time on the part of the teacher/parent. Others simply let kids play where they want to, which is great for exploring but not so great if kids just go to the easier areas and avoid activities that are hard.

Vizzle, from Monarch Teaching Technologies, has done a nice job of taking some of the best of each of these approaches and minimizing the challenges with each. Vizzle is an online subscription service that I would describe as an activity creator. It was designed for children on the autism spectrum, who often learn best through repetition and visual input, but it would also be very helpful for kids who have other special needs or even those who are typically developing. We gave it a good trial run with my ten-year-old son, Benjamin, who has Down syndrome, and my five-year-old son, Zechariah, who is gifted.

The real beauty of Vizzle, for us, was its flexibility. We could choose to start with a blank slate for an activity and design everything for one of the boys, or use an activity from the Share section that had been designed and shared by someone else, or to adapt a shared activity for our needs. So if you find an activity in the Share section that is just what you need, it only takes a minute or two to copy it to the right folders and have immediate access to a finished product. If a shared activity is almost exactly what you need, you can edit and make changes on a broad range of options, thus tailoring the activity to your needs but with much less time than creating it from scratch. Or, you can get creative and start from scratch to create exactly what you need for your child, which is a bit more time-intensive but generally very easy with the simple format of the program. We used a variety of options, but we found that for most things we were able to effectively use shared activities "as is" or with small modifications.

So what types of activities are available on Vizzle, and how does it work? There are three sections, each with extensive support and help options, including videos that demonstrate how to use the major functions of that section. The Create section lets you start from scratch to create a new activity, such as a matching board, game, or storybook. The Share section provides a powerful search function to sort through thousands of ready-made activities on a very wide range of topics. Each activity can be used “as is” or adapted as needed for your child. You can search by topic, keyword, grade level, subject, or creator. The Teach section helps you organize and use the activities. A folder is set up for each child where you can copy activities and set up playlists of activities that will play one after another. I set up a playlist for each boy that included 5-10 activities based on what each is currently learning, and a folder to hold completed activities that we might want to review later. Each activity can be played independently or as part of a playlist.

Matching Boards seem to be the most common activity type. In the center is a question square with between one and ten answers available. The child simply chooses the correct answer and then receives a reinforcer, such as a cute smiley face or bursting stars. Each question and answer can have text, pictures, and/or videos. So, for example, one of my kids’ favorite activities taught them what sounds different instruments make. The question box has an audio clip, and the answer boxes have pictures of instruments with the names under the pictures. The Storybook is basically a digital book, with pages that turn. These can include text, pictures, and videos. You can also add pop-up circles that the child clicks on for more information or a one-question quiz about that page. The game activity is set up as a digital board game, complete with a spinner and game pieces that move around the board. Landing on a space opens a pop-up page with a question to answer or information to teach. For example, we played a game of addition doubles (3+3, 6+6, etc.). Each space that we landed on opened a box with the math problem and three possible answers to choose from. At the end of each activity, the program gives a reinforcer, such as bursting bubbles, fireworks, or a rocket launch. There are also three Tools available, including a very cool Timer, and a Token Board and First-Then Board that can be printed out and used away from the computer. Vizzle Labs has activities that are still being developed, such as the Concept Builder and Expression Builder, both of which look great.

Overall, I can’t recommend this program highly enough for families of children with special needs--as well as typically developing kids! Yes, it takes a little bit of work to set things up and to stay ahead of the kids, but I thought the time was very well spent as I watched how quickly they were learning a wide variety of concepts. It was easy to sit down with a chart of what they were learning, search through the Share section to find some relevant activities, adapt them if needed, and copy the activities to their folders and playlists. The biggest problem was keeping up with the kids, as they generally mastered the activities very quickly! I was very impressed with the many different options available for customizing activities. Creating new activities was really pretty easy to do, as the program is very intuitive. The clean backgrounds and lack of clutter in activities made it look less sophisticated than many educational programs on the market, but it also helped my boys focus on the activity without excess visual clutter. The ability to use photos, text and videos, including thousands of photos available on Vizzle, made the program much more interesting and powerful. We used it for addition, learning about money, studying land forms, reading books, telling time, learning about categories and the seasons, and even some great safety activities. My older son took pictures of the boys outside demonstrating various prepositions, such as Benjamin on the trampoline, or Zechariah beside or running around

the slide. We used those to create a Matching Board that was so much fun and made the activity much more concrete. We also printed out an activity to sort foods into categories. Options are available to set up IEP goals for each child and pair activities with those goals, or simply print reports on how they are doing on each activity. I would love to see more types of activities added in the future, although the main three provide an amazing array of options. The help functions are excellent at answering specific questions or giving a good overview of a feature. Vizzle also has consultants available to help you get started with the program and to suggest applicable activities before you even log on to the system.

My kids have enjoyed working on Vizzle and, even more importantly to me, they have learned! While this program would not work well as a total curriculum, it is an outstanding tool to help kids learn new material and practice skills they are learning. The company's website, www.monarchteachtech.com, has more information about the program and the impressive list of awards Vizzle has received so far. You can also view sample activities online or even take Vizzle for a test drive for 14 days to see what you think. My mind has been reeling with the plethora of possibilities available with Vizzle!

Product review by Dr. Anne Margaret Wright, Senior Product Reviewer, The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine, LLC, June 2010



©2010 TheHomeschoolMagazine.com is a division of The Old Schoolhouse® Magazine, LLC. All rights reserved.

No content may be removed or used without permission from TheHomeschoolMagazine.com.

[Webmaster](#) [Legal](#) [Site Map](#) [Advertise](#)

HOME Where They Belong™