

Smart Fidgeting

FORMER EDUCATOR'S GROUP OF MULTISENSORY BOARD GAMES HELP CHALLENGED STUDENTS THRIVE **BY EDITH G. TOLCHIN**

BRANDI DUGAL of Austin, Texas, is a former educator who has taught students from pre-K through sixth grade in six different countries. In one of her classrooms, she discovered that 90 percent of the students could not read "... because they hadn't been given the tools they needed to succeed."

This set her wheels spinning to invent The Fidget Game, now a group of colorful and research-backed fun games to help lagging students excel.

Edith G. Tolchin (EGT): What is The Fidget Game? How did this come about?

Brandi Dugal (BD): The Fidget Game creates screen-free, multisensory board games that help kids learn to read and do math through play.

Rooted in the "Science of Reading" and designed for all learners—including those with dyslexia and ADHD—our games use fidget tools to make learning engaging and effective.

The idea was born while I was teaching in six countries. In one classroom where 95 percent of students were reading below grade

level, I gamified reading—and by year's end, 90 percent were reading at or above grade level. That's when I knew: Play changes everything.

EGT: Tell us about yourself, your education, background.

BD: I'm originally from Canada and spent six years teaching in six different countries before founding The Fidget Game. I hold a Bachelor of Environmental Science degree from the University of Waterloo and a master's in education.

I live a quiet, minimalist life focused on creating screen-free, educational games that support all types of learners. My passion lies in helping kids succeed through play, while staying connected to schools and homeschoolers to better understand the challenges they face.

EGT: What is the larger goal with the games?

BD: My goal is simple: I want to gamify the entire curriculum for children in pre-K through Grade 5, starting with literacy and math. We're expanding into Spanish and French games to support language learners, and next year, we'll launch our SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) line along with a collection of resources for children with special needs.

At the heart of it all, we aim to change how children learn, how parents connect, and how educators heal the classroom—through meaningful play, empathy and research-backed tools designed for all types of learners.

EGT: Are the games patented? If so, please share your patenting experience.

BD: Yes, we have patents pending—one for our Popplers toddler mat with large sensory bubbles and pictures, and another



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE FIDGET GAME

“In one classroom where 95 percent of students were reading below grade level, I gamified reading—and by year’s end, 90 percent were reading at or above grade level.” —BRANDI DUGAL

for being the first to feature letters and three-letter words on fidget mats.

We’re still in the approval process but are confident after extensive work with our legal team.

EGT: How has your Reading Advisory Board assisted in creating the various games?

BD: We have an amazing reading advisory board, including experts like dyslexia specialist April McMurtry, and Pamela Furr, founder of Puzzle Box Academy. After creating a game, we send it to them for feedback based on real use with students. Their insights have helped us refine and improve many of our games.

EGT: What are the outcomes of the Fidget Game in helping students? Are there specific games for, say, dyslexia, and other literacy challenges?

BD: The Fidget Game has helped thousands of kids—especially those with dyslexia, ADHD and other literacy challenges—to build reading skills through fun, multisensory play. Our games are rooted in the Science of Reading and support all types of learners.

Key titles include:

- Squishyland (pre-K to Grade 2)—teaches all foundational reading skills with leveled card packs.
- Word Pop (kindergarten to Grade 1)—builds letter sound blending and helps kids read three-letter words.
- Sight Words (kindergarten to Grade 2)—focuses on high-frequency words essential for reading fluency.
- Sneaky Elves (kindergarten to Grade 1)—helps early readers practice CVC words in a fun, fast-paced format.
- Unicorns vs. Dragons (pre-K to kindergarten)—teaches letter and number recognition through playful competition.



EGT: How did you create the prototypes for each product? Was that a difficult process?

BD: Finding the right manufacturers is key. We’re always customizing and experimenting with new materials to develop our products. There’s a lot of trial and error—refining designs, testing functionality and making adjustments—but I wouldn’t call it difficult. It’s definitely a process but one that’s incredibly rewarding when the final prototype comes together just right.

EGT: Have there been other challenges in the product development process?

BD: Product development has been one of the smoothest parts of our business, thanks to our amazing team of teachers and designers. The biggest challenge is having so many ideas and not always knowing what to prioritize first!

Inventory forecasting can also be tricky, but overall, it’s a process we truly enjoy.

EGT: Please tell us about your experience on “Shark Tank” in 2023. Did you make a deal?

BD: My “Shark Tank” experience was incredible! I made a deal on air with Barbara Corcoran, and we had a meaningful conversation about our shared passion for literacy and supporting children with dyslexia.

The Fidget Game creates screen-free, multisensory board games that help kids learn to read and do math through play.

Those conversations actually helped inspire the creation of LexiLearn—a gamified reading curriculum designed specifically for dyslexic learners. Ultimately, I chose not to move forward with the deal, as it wasn't the right fit for my business at the time. For now, I remain proudly self-funded.

EGT: What's the best thing that's happened since that experience?

BD: The growth has been amazing. We're now securing deals with bigger buyers and retailers, which is so exciting.

But the most meaningful part is still hearing from families and teachers. The stories of children learning to read, gaining confidence, and falling in love with learning—that's what makes it all worth it.

EGT: How many different games do you sell?

BD: We currently offer over 20 educational games for all grade levels from Pre-K to Grade 5, and

we're excited to be launching five brand-new math games this year!

EGT: What guidance do you have for inventors who want to develop a children's learning toy?

BD: Follow your heart and intuition, but also test constantly with kids, parents and educators. Ask for honest, even harsh, feedback, and use it to perfect your product before going to market.

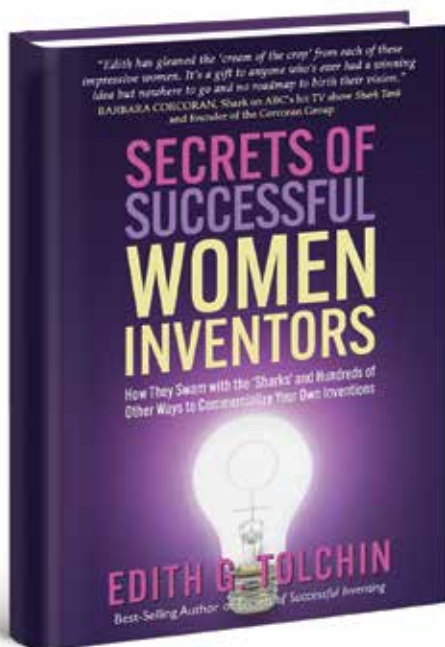
Personally, I welcome negative reviews. They help us see whether there's something we can improve. Most of the time it's valuable insight, and we act on it immediately. It's all part of creating something truly meaningful and effective for children. 📧

Details: thefidgetgame.com

Edith G. Tolchin has written for *Inventors Digest* since 2000 (edietolchin.com/portfolio). She is the author of several books, including "Secrets of Successful Women Inventors" (<https://a.co/d/fAGlvZJ>) and "Secrets of Successful Inventing" (<https://a.co/d/8dafJd6>).



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Available for purchase at Amazon (<https://tinyurl.com/334ntc3w>), Barnes & Noble, and edietolchin.com.



Edith G. Tolchin
(photo by Amy Goldstein Photography)

Edith G. Tolchin knows inventors!

Edie has interviewed over 100 inventors for her longtime column in *Inventors Digest* (www.edietolchin.com/portfolio). She has held a prestigious U.S. customs broker license since 2002. She has written five books, including the best-selling *Secrets of Successful Inventing* (2015), and *Fanny on Fire*, a recent finalist in the Foreword Reviews INDIE Book Awards.

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