

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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New app helps students to read between the lines

A new app developed through a University of Tasmania research project aims to help children crack the codes of literacy learning.

The app has been developed by PhD student Michelle Somerton, whose project focusses on embedding research-based teaching and learning strategies into iPad technology.

“My initial review of currently available apps indicated that there were very few examples of so-called learning games and programs that were built around research-based strategies,” Ms Somerton said.

“Unless explicit learning strategies are embedded into apps, we don’t really know if they are helping with learning or are simply providing children’s entertainment.”

In order to test the efficacy of research-based technology for students, Ms Somerton decided to design and build an app of her own.

Working collaboratively with Burnie-based business 41st Degree Software Ms Somerton has created a highly interactive digital text that aims to support the development of literacy skills as students move from books supported by illustrations to text-based chapter books.

Development Manager at 41st Degree Software, Rob Vernon, said Ms Somerton’s project is the largest app his company has worked on.

“It has taken five months of development time, but we see so much potential in Michelle's idea that we willingly spent some of our own time and resources to ensure that the app would be a success,” Mr Vernon explained.

“This project was as much about research and development as it was about producing a working piece of software. It also provided a great chance to highlight the talents of our programmer and graphic designer in producing an app of exceptional educational value, but also a working piece of digital art.”

The app has breathed new life into an old book that Ms Somerton discovered with the app based on a story written in the 1920's by US author Thornton W. Burgess, called *The Adventures of Billy Possum*.

Ms Somerton will be demonstrating her app at the University of Tasmania Open Day on Sunday at the Cradle Coast Campus, and will provide five free downloads of the app for children who would like to try out the new learning tool.

University of Tasmania Open Day is on from 10 am-3 pm this Sunday August 31 at the Cradle Coast Campus, Mooreville Road, Burnie.

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